JU-JU AND JUSTICE IN NIGERIA

W. A. Warren

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Photo. Elliott & Fry

FRANK HIVES

JU-JU AND JUSTICE IN NIGERIA

TOLD BY

FRANK HIVES

AND WRITTEN DOWN BY

GASCOIGNE LUMLEY

WITH 18 ILLUSTRATIONS AND SKETCH-MAP

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INTRODUCTION

THE following tales were related to me by my friend and colleague Frank Hives, and I found them so interesting that I have written them down, partly as he told them and partly from his notes. They are true stories of things that happened and of people he knew.

Hives belongs to a former generation of administrators, and was in his younger days essentially a pioneer. When he first went to Nigeria the hinterland of that protectorate was hardly touched by the civilizing influences of Trade and Government, which were confined to a few stations on the coast and on the banks of the Niger. But the country had to be opened up; and for this task were needed men possessing the qualities of resourcefulness, courage and common sense rather than mere ability to pass examinations. Hives was endowed with these qualities in no small measure, and they brought him safely out of many tight corners, besides ensuring him success in his dealings with the primitive and sometimes savage peoples over whom it was his lot to rule.

He did not go to Nigeria without previous experience. For nearly seventeen years he had roughed it in North Queensland and other Colonies. He was therefore accustomed to life in the wilds, and really liked it better than a tamer existence under more settled conditions.

His knowledge of "bushwhacking" was invaluable, and it was utilized to the full by those who had the ordering of his career. For whenever there was a difficult or dangerous undertaking, such as the opening of a new station, the pacification of a rebellious one, or a political adviser needed for an expedition, he was the man to be selected. Some of his tales deal with incidents which happened on such occasions.

But before proceeding to relate them it might not be out of place to give some explanation of an institution referred to in several of the tales, namely, the "Long Ju-ju of Aro-Chuku."

The term ju-ju means the same as fetish, or obeah. It is not a native African word, but is derived from the French *jeu*, a play; though of course it is more than a play, it is a religion.

The Aro-Chuku ju-ju was an oracle, served by its special priests. It was situated some thirty or forty miles from the right bank of the Cross River and about a hundred and twenty from the sea, and was so well known that its influence extended throughout the Delta and for many miles up the Niger itself.

Its purposes were divination and detection. The priests would cause it to interpret dreams, foretell the future or decide whether accused persons were innocent or guilty. They gave out that in order to make it function fresh human blood was needed.

Of course these services cost something; and the fees demanded were generally paid in slaves, who were believed by those who brought them to be sacrificed to the ju-ju. This, however, was not carried out on the majority of occasions, because the priests found it more profitable to dispose of the victims otherwise.

All native chiefs or potentates, when they move abroad, are accompanied by a retinue, which varies in numbers according to the importance of the chief. When they die they are believed to go to another place similar to the one over which they have ruled; and, in order that they may not be mistaken for ordinary men in this place, they must be accompanied by a retinue suitable to their condition.

This retinue was provided for them by their sorrowing relatives, who purchased slaves and sacrificed them at the chief's funeral. An important chief naturally needed a large following to prove his importance; consequently when he died there was considerable slaughter.

The Aro-Chuku[1] priests found the business of providing retinues for deceased chiefs in the next world a very profitable one. Instead of killing the slave brought to them to make the oracle talk, they would kill a goat or a pig and exhibit its blood in the sacred stream to their dupe, who believed it to be that of the slave he had brought.

Of course the oracle talked, notwithstanding that the human victim remained alive, though he was never seen again by those who brought him. His fate was merely deferred for a few weeks or months. But perhaps he did not know that; one hopes not.

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[1] See Appendix.

With this explanation I present the tales. I have written them as far as possible in Hives's own words, and if they interest the reading public as much as they did me the success of our joint effort in authorship will be assured.

G. Lumley.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

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I

EARLY DAYS

I RECEIVED instructions from the Colonial Office to sail for Old Calabar on January 14th, 19—, and on arrival to report myself to the High Commissioner resident there. I had a very hazy idea of the whereabouts of this place; but with the help of an atlas, and the few books I could find which dealt with West Africa, I managed to discover the position of it.

The officials of the Colonial Office could give me very little practical assistance in the way of advice regarding the sort of outfit I should require, but in this matter I had experience, and also a certain amount of tropical clothing, so that I did not make the mistake that most newly-appointed officials usually do, that is, of expending large sums of money on a lot of useless paraphernalia that is always an encumbrance when travelling. I intended to travel light, and I did.

My first intimation that the climate of the country was an unhealthy one was when I received by post a neatly done-up packet, which on opening I found to contain a bottle of one hundred "tabloids" of quinine, together with printed instructions that I was to take one of these daily after the steamer had passed Sierra Leone on the voyage out.

My next "shock" was when I was having a farewell supper at Jimmy's, with a friend. A young fellow, who had evidently looked on the wine when it was red, suddenly flopped himself down on the vacant chair at our table. He asked if we minded him eating his "shark" with us (he had ordered a fried sole) while we were eating our "mackerel" (we had ordered whitebait).

Upon our assuring him that we would be pleased if he would do so—for we could hardly do otherwise in the circumstances—he informed us, between hiccoughs, that he had just returned from "The white mansh grave, Wesht Africa."

I told him that I was starting for that place in two days' time; whereupon he wept alcoholic tears and wanted to embrace me, saying: "Mansh, if you haven't gone yet, don't gosh; you will diesh."

This was cheerful news to hear. And after our newly-found friend had subsided under the table we thought it time to render him assistance; and having with difficulty got out of him that he "wanted to go home to Mother"—he giving that lady's address after several ineffectual attempts—we put him in a hansom cab.

This was the last I saw of the gentleman and, needless to say, I took no notice of his advice.

My steamer was due to sail from Liverpool, and I had to go there the day before—for in those days boat trains did not run for West Africans. I found Liverpool on a cold, wet day, early in January, a very depressing place. And it was not improved by the circumstances of my presence in it; for when one is leaving one's native heath, friends and relations, possibly never to see them again, cheerfulness has to be assumed.

My steamer was the " Sokoto "—by no means the crack one of the line—such as that was; and my fellow-passengers were nearly all Government officials, most of whom had already spent several years on the " Coast." I was the only " new chum " going out, and at first felt somewhat out of everything; for the talk was mostly about subjects familiar enough to these experienced people, but double Dutch to me. Every department seemed to be represented, Forestry, Legal, P.W.D., Force, and others. But there were no administrative officers, which was a pity, as I could not find out what my duties were likely to be.

All these more or less old stagers did their best to pull my leg, trying to scare me by telling harrowing tales of what happened to most men who went out to the " White man's grave," or entered the " Bight of Benin, where few come out though many go in." These stories I capped by more harrowing ones from other parts of the world. And when they found that the fish did not rise they gave up trying to be " funny." Then we got on very well together, and I found them to be extremely good fellows. Most of them have paid the price, and have left their bones in the land, pioneers who went to prepare the way for those who have come after.

Of the voyage I need say nothing. You have made it many times, and also know that the first one always seems to be the longest. We arrived outside the Calabar River in due course to find the entrance hidden by a thick harmattan, so that no land was visible, and we went in on soundings, after several heavy bumps on the bar, arriving at Old Calabar—forty miles up the river—by 1 p.m. on a very hot Saturday afternoon.

The steamer did not go alongside, but lay at anchor in the stream about a hundred or so yards from the shore. Numerous smartly turned-out gigs and small steam launches arrived alongside, all flying the blue Colonial ensign. From these many white men came on board, and I heard greetings given. "Hallo, old man. Back again. Looking awfully fit, you know." Everyone seemed to know everyone else; but I looked in vain for one to greet me. Feeling very much out of it all, I retired to the "square" in front of the saloon, and was about to order a cold lager to comfort me in my loneliness, when I heard a man's voice outside inquiring if there was anybody of the name of Hives on board. Thinking it as well to "take notice" of this, I rose and went on deck, where I saw a tall, well-dressed man who appeared to be very hot and not in the best of tempers. Going up to him I asked him if he were looking for me, giving my name.

At this the irate one took two steps backwards and, looking me up and down for several seconds, said:

"May I ask who you are, and what you are, to cause me to be deprived of my Saturday afternoon's sleep? Why have I to come and meet you in this heat?"

I replied politely that I was indeed sorry to have been the innocent cause of his having been so badly treated, and informed him that I was a newly-appointed Assistant District Commissioner, and had been instructed to report myself to the High Commissioner.

I then proceeded to tell him that there was some very excellent iced lager on board, and suggested that we would be more comfortable in the "square" with glasses of it in front of us.

At this a gleam of pleasure showed in his melancholy eyes, and he became more friendly until, when the foaming tumblers were placed before us, he was quite affable. He told me that, after a lot of trouble and the moving of another official into double quarters, accommodation had been arranged for me in the District House, where he and several others had quarters.

With his assistance I selected a servant from the crowd of applicants outside on the deck, all holding out "books" (*i.e.* references) to be read. The selection turned out to be a lucky one, as the boy remained with me for many years afterwards. He told me also to hand over all my luggage to this boy, which I did, though never expecting to see it again.

Then we proceeded on shore in one of the smart launches, and climbed the two-hundred-foot hill to the District House under the fierce rays of the tropical sun.

I found the house to be a sort of barrack, with quarters arranged all round a mess-room, and an ante-room in front containing easy chairs, newspapers and periodicals. Several of the resident officials had awakened from their Saturday afternoon *caulks*, and were arrayed in all sorts of garbs, from the simple bath towel to the more elaborate dressing-gown.

Having been introduced to these by my friend, and given a cup of tea with some fruit, I was shown to my rooms, where I found my luggage, and the boy waiting for my keys so that he could unpack.

Having changed into "store clothes," I then proceeded to Government House and sent in my card to the Acting High Commissioner. The orderly reappeared in a few minutes and requested me, in almost unintelligible pidgin-English, to follow him into the "big white man's" presence. I was ushered into a large, well-appointed room on the first floor, where I saw a tall, immaculately-dressed man lying back in a long chair reading a book.

He rose when I appeared, very slowly, as though it were an effort, and shook hands perfunctorily, inquiring if I had had a pleasant voyage out. Then, without waiting for an answer, he told me that he had received information of my expected arrival, and had specially arranged to have me met, and had provided quarters for me.

I thanked him, but wondered if it were usual for "new chums" to have to find their own way about on arrival, and if they were expected to search for accommodation for themselves. I felt very grateful to my highly-placed friend in England, whose letter had saved me from this unpleasant experience. Also I found out later by experience that the administrative branch of the service was very casual in this matter, though the heads of Departments were more considerate to their juniors.

This explained the annoyance of the man who had met me. Distinctly he would have preferred to sleep and to have left me to my own devices.

After this my chief, as I had now learned to look upon him, produced a Bible and gave it to me to hold, telling me to repeat after him what he said. I gathered that this was the oath of allegiance and, having taken this before on several occasions in Queensland, I did not wait for him, but, after the first sentence, completed it without assistance. At this he seemed somewhat surprised and, I thought, a little annoyed.

When this was over and I had signed the usual declaration, I asked for instructions. Whereupon he informed me that he had detailed me for duty as assistant to the District Commissioner at Bende, a newly opened-up District about a hundred and fifty miles up the river and inland from Old Calabar; and that I must arrange to proceed there the following morning by a steam launch that was leaving for a place called Itu at eight o'clock.

I was very much taken aback by this; for I had nothing in the way of stores, cooking utensils, etc., with me, expecting, according to the rather scrappy information I had received, to be able to obtain them locally. I pointed out this fact, and after some hesitation and, I thought, unpleasant remarks, he said I could remain in Old Calabar two days in order to purchase what was necessary. Then he would arrange for a special launch to take me to Itu.

I asked him what my duties would be, and he told me that I would learn them from the District Commissioner under whom I would be serving. Then I inquired where Bende was situated, and how I was to get there after landing at Itu. He got a little flustered at this, but at length replied that I would have to proceed from Itu to a place called Afikpo, some sixty miles farther up the river, and thence trek overland for two days. The directions he gave me were very hazy, as he did not say how I was to get up river from Itu. I guessed rightly that he had never been to Bende himself, and determined to find out from some one who had more knowledge of that part of the country.

I bowed myself out and returned to the District house. Here I found it was "guest night," so went at once to my room to dress. A number of officials belonging to various departments were among those invited, and rounds of "Coast" cocktails were brought in by the servants. Seventeen sat down to dinner, and after this festive meal had been disposed of the fun started.

Some began to play bridge—then a new game out there; but they did not get much chance to continue. Others sang songs to the accompaniment of a very wheezy piano, which did not improve in tone as glasses were upset and their contents spilled into its interior. A few bright sparks raced each other across the floor, mounted on empty beer bottles, falling grotesquely and picking themselves up again amidst much laughter and cheering; while a couple of classical scholars posed the mess servants on tables and chairs, calling on others to see the ebony Apollo, the black Bacchus, or the sable Hermes they imagined they had created. Altogether it was an amusing if somewhat hectic evening, and doubtless many were very glad that the next day was a Sunday.

On Monday I purchased my stores at the "factories" by the river, also cooking utensils and a bicycle, for which I had to pay what I considered an exorbitant price. Then on the following morning I left Old Calabar on a very comfortable launch called the "Magpie," arriving at Itu—fifty miles up the river—in the afternoon.

The quartermaster of the launch was very anxious to get rid of me and my loads, as it appeared he had instructions to return to Old Calabar the same night. But I most emphatically refused to be dumped on the bare strip of sandy beach, with nothing in sight but river and forest. There seemed to be nowhere to go and nothing in which to get there.

Then my sable henchman came to my assistance. I had told him I was going to Bende, but would first have to go sixty miles up river. He seemed surprised at this, and asked me how we could get there, as there were no canoes and no road existed. I could not tell him, and wondered if I had better keep the launch to live in until some means of conveyance was forthcoming. It could not go any higher, as the river was too shallow for a vessel drawing so much water.

He then said that, unless it was really imperative that I should travel via Afikpo, I could go by a better and shorter route to Bende. He had been to that place twice before with different white men, and described the proper route as up the Enyong creek, the opening into which he showed me only a few hundred yards away. Also he said that there was a steel canoe due at Itu with mails from Aro-Chuku that evening, and that I might go up the creek in it as far as Aro-Chuku beach.

The boy seemed to be so certain of the correct route, and my chief at Old Calabar had been so much the opposite, that I decided to take the latest advice. So I resigned myself to wait, and was greatly relieved when, about an hour after sunset, I heard the chanting of weird songs, and then the sound of paddles as the canoe rounded the bend.

It was a flat-bottomed craft, about forty feet in length and eight in beam, built of very thin steel plates and drawing only a few inches of water. Fourteen paddlers, seven a side, propelled it. They sat on the gunnel, and each gave tongue at every stroke, the result being the chorus I had heard. The steersman stood up in the stern and guided the strange craft with a long oar. He was the soloist to the chorus, singing a short sentence in a sort of minor key, using only about four notes; and this was repeated by the paddlers, who added a few words or varied the original ones. What the songs were about I had no idea, but I imagined them to be something of the nature of barcarolles.

The canoe came up in fine style, and brought up alongside the launch to transfer two very attenuated mail bags. After this the crew prepared and ate their evening meal and, when that had been disposed of, curled up on the bottom of their craft to sleep till morning.

I also had my dinner, consisting of a tin of soup, a tin of salmon and one of "Army Ration," hotted up by my boy on the stove of the launch. Then I had my camp bed put up in the cabin and was soon asleep.

The following morning at daybreak I transferred myself and my loads to the canoe, and said good-bye to the last link binding me to civilization as the launch steamed away down river.

It was a long, tedious and hot trip up the Enyong Creek, the distance to Aro-Chuku beach being twelve miles. But it was all against the stream—which ran very strongly—and the paddlers sweated profusely, so that, what with the odour they disseminated and the monotony of their chanting, I was very sick of the journey. But everything, however unpleasant, has an end, and about two in the afternoon I arrived at my immediate destination, which I found to be only a short strip of yellow mud between the water and the jungle. Nothing else was visible to indicate human beings being present, not a house or a hut of any sort, and not a living thing; just a narrow path that had been cut through the bush.

The crew of the canoe assisted to land my stuff and then faded away, leaving me, with my loads and my servant, to make our own way as best we knew how.

It was appallingly hot, the sun being almost directly overhead, and its rays heated up the air so that everything seen through it quivered. I had visions of my tinned provisions being cooked before needed, and of the case of tinned butter being turned to oil. So I told my boy, whose name was Dick, to collect a few palm leaves and cover up the loads.

Having done this he informed me that the station of Aro-Chuku was about five miles inland from where we were, and that we would have to go there before we could raise carriers to take the cases.

I did not care to leave the loads unguarded, nor did I think it advisable to send the boy on alone, so

I determined to go forward by myself, taking my bicycle in case the road [*sic*] would prove good enough for that form of progress.

The going was quite good after the first hundred yards or so, but there were complications in the way of branching paths. I knew I could find my way back, however, because the wheels of my bicycle left very distinct tracks in the dust, but several times I had to dismount and consider which route to follow.

Evidently I had chosen aright, for to my joy I presently emerged into a clearing, and saw a tin-roofed bungalow perched on a slight rise about a quarter of a mile away, and near it several smaller buildings.

By this time I was bathed in perspiration, and was still hotter by the time I had pushed my machine up the hill. I could still see no sign of the presence of any white man, but there were a few natives moving about. They took no notice of me, and I went on to the bungalow with the intention of knocking up whoever was inside. But before I had time to mount the veranda steps an extraordinary-looking being appeared.

He was evidently a white man, though tanned brown by the sun. About six days' growth of grizzled beard covered his face, and he wore a battered pith helmet that had seen many better days, looking as though it had been used as a seat not once but often. His clothing consisted of a ragged and none too clean flannel shirt, open at the neck to expose a very brown and hairy chest; with khaki shorts, frayed at the bottom and as unclean as the shirt. Black rubber sand shoes without laces covered his feet, but he wore no socks, so that his hairy legs were bare from ankle to mid-thigh.

As this gentleman did not greet me, nor make any attempt to welcome me—simply standing and staring as though I were an apparition—I politely raised my nice new helmet and said:

"Dr. Livingstone, I presume."

"No, Dr. Brown," was the reply.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, my mistake," I rejoined, hiding my amusement; and then asked him if the District Commissioner was in.

At this he jerked his thumb in the direction of a long, low structure, built native fashion with mud walls and palm-leaf roof.

"Court House," he muttered.

I thanked him for the information and proceeded across to this building. Here I found the man I sought, looking pale and tired, sitting on a raised platform at one end. The Court was filled with natives of both sexes, all intent on the proceedings. Evidently some interesting case was being tried.

I passed through the throng with the assistance of a couple of uniformed court-messengers, who cleared a way for me by the simple process of beating over the head with their canes all those who did not give way.

I had nothing to complain about regarding my welcome from the Commissioner, and found him very helpful. He closed the Court as soon as he had finished with the witness then being examined—adjourning the case. Then he ordered a native policeman to go and collect at once the number of carriers I needed, and to take them to the beach to bring my gear to his house. Then he took me over to the bungalow and gave me some tea.

Later, in the evening when yarning over a whisky and sparklet, I found that his father was a doctor in the south of England who had attended me when, as a small boy, I had scarlet fever. Having made the stereotyped remark about how small the world was, we soon became quite friendly, and he was most kind to me. Poor chap, like so many others I met in those early days, he has long since joined the silent majority.

The next morning I made an early start, following a long line of carriers for sixteen miles to a place called Eguru, where there was a rest house of the ordinary bush type, that is, just four mud walls and a roof of mats made from the raffia palm.

I found the inhabitants of this place holding a festival of sorts. They were in a very excited state and appeared to be anything but friendly. The old chief of the village was distinctly under the influence of trade gin, or tumbo; probably a mixture of both. He was distinctly surly, and stood on the path in front of me, blocking my way and making gestures for me to go back.

I could not understand his remarks, which was perhaps just as well. But Dick could speak the language a little, and interpreted—probably editing his translation—so I got the meaning of them.

"Go away, back to your own country, we don't want you here."

That was clear enough, and it made me angry; so

I gave him a strong push that sent him sprawling into the bush at the side of the path. He had been none too steady on his pins, so that not much effort was needed to floor him.

At this there was a howl of anger from his people. For a few moments pandemonium reigned, and I thought I was "for it." My carriers were for dropping their loads and clearing, and it was with great difficulty that I prevented a stampede; but eventually I did so and, assuming a nonchalant air, I strolled past the fallen chief and gained the rest house. Probably the air of confidence, though it was only assumed, saved me from a sticky death; for the people fell back before me, muttering and cursing. Evidently they thought I had force behind me, and the moral effect of their belief cowed them.

While I was having the rest house, which was in a filthy condition, cleaned up by some of the carriers, I heard a good deal of shouting and beating of tom-toms. This was not reassuring at all, for if these people got themselves worked up again they might come for me during the night. So, after thinking things over a bit, I sent Dick to the village with instructions to get into touch with some of the more influential of the people, and to insinuate that I was a noted firebrand, as well as a powerful ju-ju man, who could and would take summary vengeance on anyone who gave offence.

The boy was not very willing to do this at first, but eventually he went; returning in about half an hour's time to report that he had told some of the people what I had said. Probably he had added to the tale of my greatness on his own initiative; but, whatever the reason, I was not molested that night.

I was out and away very early next morning, before the villagers had time to get over the effects of their potations of the night before, and started on an exceedingly hot and dusty trek of eighteen miles or so over a most poisonous bush path, which was mostly loose sand. I reached my destination, Bende, then a very new station, late in the afternoon.

Here a black police-constable directed me to a native-built house in which he said the District Commissioner's office was situated. This building was divided into three "rooms," one of which was the District office, the second the treasury, and the third a clerk's office.

Outside of this I was met by a patriarchal native, black as the inside of a coal-scuttle, who might easily have passed as "Poor old Joe." This I found was the head clerk, a native of Sierra Leone who rejoiced in the name of Herbert Spencer. The venerable old gentleman did his best to answer my inquiries, but was handicapped by so bad a stutter that at first he could only stand and gape.

I suggested that he should sing what he wanted to say; but that idea made him even more nervous. However, after many painful efforts he at length managed to inform me that both the District Commissioner and the doctor were away, the latter being my friend of Aro-Chuku, Dr. "Livingstone." I gathered also that the Officer Commanding the company of troops had gone out on a patrol, and there was only the Assistant District Commissioner at home, and that he was dying of fever in the bungalow.

This, I thought, was a very sorry welcome to my new station, and I wended my way across to the bungalow. At the entrance to this I saw two boys, the bigger of whom informed me that his "massa live for die for topside," meaning that his master was very ill in one of the upper rooms.

I told the boy to show me the place, and followed him upstairs, where, stretched upon a camp bed in an almost unfurnished room, was a young man, evidently in the grip of a very bad "go" of malarial fever. He was conscious, and when I told him who I was he just said:

"Thank God, now I can get away from this accursed country—never to return to it."

I got my gear into an empty room and then started in to nurse the young man, dosing him frequently with quinine until his temperature abated. Then I arranged to hammock him down to Aro-Chuku, and from there he went home. He never returned to the country.

After this I was alone in the station for about a week, until the District Commissioner returned, with the company of troops and the Officer Commanding it. I found him to be an exceedingly nice fellow in every sense of the word, and he was very helpful to me while I was learning my new duties. But he looked, and was, a very sick man, and I had an anxious week with him until the doctor came back from visiting the other stations over the health of which he presided.

By that time the District Commissioner was very ill indeed, and I could see that the doctor was puzzled. I suggested poison, but the idea was pooh-poohed. I still contend, however, that some native drug had been administered to him, either by one of his boys or by someone who had a grudge against him.

There was nothing to do but send him to Old Calabar as soon as possible, the doctor going with him. So I arranged for a hammock and relays of carriers, together with an escort, to get him to Aro-Chuku beach, thence down river in a launch. He died a few days after entering hospital.

Soon after this I received instructions to take over charge of the District, which I did, after having done duty as an assistant for less than a month.

II

The Kamalu Ju-ju

THERE was considerably more fuss and excitement over the Aro-Chuku expedition of 1900 than its scope or importance warranted, as those who were in Old Calabar at the time well knew.

The expedition was sent up the Cross River in order to find and destroy the notorious "Long Ju-ju," that diabolical oracle run by the Aro tribe for their own profit, and for keeping the country terrorized into submission to them. Full accounts of it were published at the time, so I need not make more than a passing reference to it.

There was actually no fighting at the taking of the town of Aro-Chuku, and the ju-ju grove, with its gruesome relics, fell into our hands without a show of resistance. It was destroyed, and the ju-ju, it was thought, stamped out of existence—discredited by the failure of its supposed powers to protect itself.

But this was not the case; for most of the Aro priests escaped, including the head one, and they re-established the oracle at other places, keeping its site a secret as long as possible, and moving it whenever there was a suspicion that the secret was becoming too widely known. It was thus extremely difficult to obtain any reliable information as to its whereabouts, except that it was somewhere in my District.

It was therefore " up to me " to " get a move on," and I made extensive inquiries, all of which, however, led to nothing, because of the terror of the natives, who believed absolutely in the power of the priests to " smell out " and punish any informer, by virtue of their supposed supernatural methods.

There was no doubt that my inquiries kept the oracle on the move. During three or four months it must have been dismantled and re-established several times, but always it remained somewhere within my sphere of action.

To the north and north-east the limits of my District were undefined, and also I could go only about eight miles or so in that direction, unless I had had a numerous escort, and that was not just then available. There the country was quite unknown. So far as I knew no white man had ever set foot in it, and it was not until some years later that it was opened up by the Bende-Onitsha Hinterland expedition, under the command of Major (now Chief Air Marshal Sir Hugh) Trenchard, I being the political and intelligence officer attached to it.

But " to return to our muttons." As it is natural to suppose, this unknown country became the rendezvous and resort of all the " bad " men of the District. There they made their headquarters, and from there they organized raids, the objects of which were to obtain victims for the sacrificial rites that were said to be necessary in order to make the oracle " talk."

These oracles were quite paying businesses, and, owing to the big profits made, several smaller ones were started, on less ambitious lines than the original one at Aro-Chuku.

During my first three months at Bende I worked very hard at learning Ibo, the language generally spoken in that part, and being rather good at picking up native dialects—though no good at civilized ones—I soon knew enough to do without an interpreter at a pinch when sitting in the native courts, and when on tour.

I was careful at first not to let any of the natives know that I could understand their conversation, and this was the easier since I could not speak it well enough to venture to conduct a case entirely in the vernacular. The knowledge I possessed was, however, sufficient to give me a distinct advantage, since, being confident that they were not understood, the people would discuss in my presence—in their own language—matters about which it was to my interest to know. This information I stored up for future use, and many a false witness have I "flabbergasted" by bringing up his own words against him.

Natives, as you know, are very good at summing up a white man. They "try him out" at first in various ways, and in a very short time he gets his nicknames; one for general use, and the other applied to him only when he cannot hear.

I soon found out my "benign" nickname; it was Abaja-Aka—meaning the "hairy-armed man." This stuck to me during the whole of the time I was in the Ibo country, and is still used, I am told, when they have occasion to refer to me and my times.

The other name, which was never used directly to me, and only spoken aloud when it was believed I could not understand it, was Itchuena, a scorpion; and the significance of it was: " Leave him alone and he won't hurt you, but touch him and look out."

Curiously enough these names were applied to me also when I went into the Hausa-speaking country, they being in that language Maigashi and Kunama.

But I am " divagating " again. To get back to the ju-jus.

I had heard of an oracle named Kamalu, it being called after the " priest " who ran it, but for a long time I could not locate it. I understood it to be run on similar lines to the " Long Ju-ju " of Aro-Chuku, that is, the charges for consulting it were paid in slaves; a certain proportion of these being sacrificed to the ju-ju, and the remainder sold to relatives of deceased chiefs, who used them for sacrificial purposes, with the object of providing a retinue for the departed when he entered the next world. A good many victims of this sort were sacrificed each year, the actual number depending on the " bigness," or importance, of the dead chief. After being killed the victims' heads were buried near the chief's grave, and their bodies were cut up and eaten by the members of the " family."

Very soon the activities of Kamalu became widespread. People were mysteriously disappearing with great frequency; and soon complaints began to filter through to Old Calabar, the matter being taken up by the missionaries. I had several strong hints from the powers that were that I must " get busy " about it. But this was easier said than done, and for several weeks the site of the oracle might have been at the North Pole for all the information I could gather about it.

Then a stroke of pure luck attended my efforts. I was at a place called Oloko, where there were a native court house, a rest house, barracks for police, and an educated Bonny man stationed as clerk to the native court.

I had gone to Oloko to preside over the native court while cases were being tried, and one evening at about six o'clock, when returning from shooting a few bush fowl for the pot, I was passing the police barracks when I overheard a passing native say in Ibo to one of the court messengers, who was sitting at the door of his hut, " Kamalu calls you at midnight, fail at your peril." The court messenger appeared to be terrified, and the stranger native walked on without another word. I did the same, pretending I had not understood, and returned to the rest house.

I knew at once that I had accidentally stumbled on a very live clue to what I was looking for, and determined to follow it up by every means in my power. When I reached the rest house I sent Dick for the native court clerk, quite a good lad named Banigo, who, before he fell from grace to the tune of about eighty pounds of the native court funds, could be trusted.

I explained to him what I had heard, and he agreed with me that I was likely to get to know a lot about the Kamalu ju-ju if I could get the court messenger to talk. So I told him to bring the man along; and presently he reappeared, accompanied by a fine strapping young native of about twenty-two years of age, named Okoro, who came from a town near Bende, and had been enlisted by my predecessor.

I took the young man into one of the empty rooms of the rest house, closing the door and ordering all the rest of my staff to keep away. Okoro by this time was becoming alarmed; but I told him he had no cause for fear if he answered truthfully all the questions I was about to put to him. But if he lied to me, then he would do well to beware of the "scorpion."

I then repeated to him in Ibo the words I had overheard the stranger native say to him, "Kamalu calls you to-night, fail at your peril," watching his face closely the while to see the result of what to him must have been a bombshell. If it is possible for a black man to turn a sickly green this one certainly did. He shivered and shook as if he had an attack of ague, while looking furtively round for some means of escape from the room. But there was only one entrance, and I stood in front of that.

I did my best to quieten his fear, telling him again that nothing would happen to him if only he spoke the truth. "I, Abaja-Aka," I said, "had sworn to rid the world of this accursed ju-ju; and that my ju-ju—that of the 'scorpion'—was much stronger than anything that Kamalu could raise."

Still he was silent, so I proceeded: "I know you are a member, a brother of the ju-ju, but I am willing to grant you a free pardon for anything you may have done. Also my ju-ju, being so much stronger than that of Kamalu, can protect you. I will see that you do not suffer, and will if necessary transfer you to a distant part of the District. But you must talk."

These promises, however, were not enough to make him speak, so absolutely terrified was he at the thought of what I wanted him to do. He swore by all his gods that he knew nothing about the ju-ju, which did not exist; and that he had never heard the name of Kamalu.

I argued with him for over half an hour without result, and then called in Banigo. This bright young man recommended that the wretched Okoro should be flogged until he confessed. If he still refused to speak, then he should be decapitated, together with his wives and children, and the heads sent to Kamalu as an earnest of what would be done to him.

I could not help smiling at this drastic recommendation, which was so much in keeping with the customs of the country. But naturally it was one impossible for me to carry out. Meanwhile Banigo launched into a sort of eulogy of my powers, extolling my greatness and ability to punish by occult means all those who did not submit to my will. He described in detail, of course quite untruly, several horrible deeds he said he had seen me do to recalcitrant witnesses, and finally so played on the fears of the young court messenger that the trembling wretch fell on his knees, begging for mercy and stating that he was willing to tell all he knew.

The method used was, I admit, a brutal one—savouring of the so-called " third degree " of America. But I allowed Banigo to carry it out because the end justified the means. The stamping out of the diabolical ju-ju, which was costing the lives of hundreds of people—to say nothing of the tortures inflicted on these unfortunates before death—was far more important than the few moments of mental agony that Okoro would suffer.

The young man's confession certainly gave me the information I wanted. He admitted he was a member of the ju-ju; but he had been forced to join it against his will; and, although he had already attended several meetings—at which his presence was compulsory—he had never taken any active part in them. I told him I quite understood that, and was prepared to forgive and protect him now that he had turned "sensible."

He then proceeded to describe what happened at the midnight meetings; and his description, prepared as I was for horrors, caused my hair to stand on end, and made me more than ever determined to destroy this iniquitous ju-ju, lock, stock and barrel.

I had guessed by this time that Kamalu's headquarters was not far away; so I was not surprised when Okoro told me it was situated just outside a small village in the Anang country, about three hours' march from where we were. That night, he said, the brotherhood of blood was holding high revels, which all members had been commanded to attend, including himself. But whether his presence was required as a guest or as a victim he could not say. He certainly feared the latter, as he had acquired considerable wealth in the form of three wives, two cows, several goats, dogs and fowls—besides four children; all of which would become the property of the ju-ju should he be "outed."

When the horrible narrative was concluded it was about seven o'clock, and I reckoned that if I started by

POLICE CORPORAL KEMMER

TYPICAL GROUP OF CANNIBALS

(THE LEOPARD-SKIN BAG CONTAINED COOKED HUMAN HANDS)

eight I would reach the place of the ju-ju just before midnight. So, having placed a guard over Okoro in case he did a bolt, I had my supper and made ready for the night march.

I had with me only six native constables, and of these I had to leave two to guard some prisoners I was taking back to Bende for trial. To augment this small force I selected four hefty Hausa carriers who, I knew, would not have any fear of Ibo ju-jus, they being Muhammadans, and having their own particular djinns. I also took Dick—who was very keen to come—Banigo and, of course, the court messenger Okoro as a guide.

The police had their rifles—with twenty rounds of ammunition each—and their matchets. I had my fourteen-shot Winchester repeating rifle and a six-chambered Webley revolver, the former being carried by Dick—unloaded. Banigo carried a police rifle, while the four Hausa carriers had only matchets; but they were experts in the use of this universal weapon and tool.

I had warned Okoro to keep a still tongue regarding our destination, and now instructed him to lead the way, but to warn me when we reached a point within a mile of the place.

We started along the path—quite a good one—which led through the small town of Erriam, where there was a native-built rest house formerly used by officials travelling between Ikot-Ekpene and Bende, but which was seldom occupied these days. It was a bright moonlight night and quite cool, so that walking was at first quite a pleasure, and progress good.

The police and carriers were quite excited. I do not know how much they guessed regarding the object of the march, but it could only have been conjecture in any case, for I had taken every precaution to keep them in ignorance, fearing that they might have time to become scared if they had the whole time occupied by the march to reflect upon what was going to be done. I certainly did them an injustice as things turned out, but I could not afford to take any chances.

We reached Erriam at about half-past ten, without having encountered a living soul on the road. Then I called a short halt and explained to the police exactly what it was in my mind to do. I did this then because I reckoned that, however much afraid they might be to go on, they would be still more afraid to go back without the protection of my supposed ju-ju. They certainly showed signs of funk, as was only natural, but not to the extent I had anticipated. Evidently they had a certain amount of confidence in my power, or what they believed to be my power, to protect them from supernatural dangers; and they did not fear anything human. The carriers were delighted with the prospect of possible loot, and did a good deal of jeering at the fears of the police. They at any rate would not turn back, especially as I told them that the ju-ju we were going to attack was as nothing compared to mine, or even theirs.

I also explained to the police that their conduct during the attack would be reported to headquarters, and if they behaved well there would probably be promotion for them, as well as a possible gratuity.

So far as I could gather from Okoro, the Anang village was not more than a mile away, and the place of the Kamalu ju-ju about half a mile beyond that. He stated, however, that the path was very narrow and winding, as the ground was broken and hilly; this I found to be correct.

I then made my final dispositions. Okoro was to lead the way. I followed with one native constable, then Banigo, two constables, Dick, the four carriers, and the remaining constable bringing up the rear. We had to march in single file, the path not admitting of two walking abreast. No talking or any other avoidable noise was to be allowed, and no shooting until I gave the word, and then they were only to fire into the air, for my ambition was to take Kamalu, and as many of his satellites as possible, alive, so that they could be brought to trial.

My idea was to reach the ju-ju place while the gruesome revels were at their height; make as much noise as possible once we were inside, by shouting and firing into the air, and make a bee line for Kamalu. If taken by surprise in this manner the assembled members of the ju-ju might think an army had descended on them, and clear out as quickly as they could; but Kamalu would not get away if I could help it. At the same time if any of the crowd attempted to show fight I could easily shoot them down with my revolver at close range. It would then be an act of self-defence.

I figured, from Okoro's description, that the ju-ju would be within a walled enclosure, and this proved to be the case.

We left Erriam and started off in the order named in perfect silence, and had not gone far when we heard in the distance the sound of the muffled beating of tom-toms coming from the direction of our objective. At first I thought we had been discovered, but Okoro assured me in a breathless whisper that this was not the case. The drumming was part of the ceremonial, and was intended to smother the dying screams of the poor tortured victims.

I hastened the advance, and soon came to the Anang village about which Okoro had told me. It was like a place of the dead. Not a sound could be heard in it as we passed through. Even the inevitable and ubiquitous pie dog was not in evidence, with his usually persistent yapping and snarling. Fear seemed to have paralyzed everything.

After we had left the village behind I called another halt and gave the police orders to load their rifles as quietly as possible. I then filled the magazines of my Winchester, examined my revolver, and stuffed as many cartridges for both weapons as I could into the pockets of my khaki shirt and shorts. Okoro, Banigo, the carriers, and my servant Dick, kept their matchets handy, and I could see that these had been well polished, for they flashed in the moonlight.

The excitement was now intense, and I could see that most of the members of my party were a bit "jumpy," especially Okoro. I admit that I was somewhat inclined that way myself, but was determined to see the thing through. It was not exactly fear that I felt, but my responsibility in case anything went wrong. I knew well enough by this time that if I succeeded in the enterprise all would be well, and I would get "kudos." But failure and loss of life would be met by censure and repudiation. I would be accused of filibustering. However, nothing succeeds like success, so I went on.

It was an eerie business. The path became still narrower so that the branches met in places. Boughs hung overhead sometimes only a few feet above us as we walked, the moonbeams filtering through them, making patches of light that looked like pools of water in front. My greatest fear was that there might be guards stationed at the entrance of the ju-ju house armed with guns, and that they might fire them off and so give the alarm before I was ready. Then all my plans would come to naught, for the priests would have time to escape; or else we should all be wiped out, and then be used for the greater glory of Kamalu.

But Okoro assured me that guards were never mounted, as Kamalu had such faith in the efficacy of his ju-ju, and its power to keep out intruders, that he considered none were needed. Still I was doubtful and expected at any moment to see the flashes of guns fired at close range, and to feel myself filled with bits of old iron, brass or copper, with which natives load the barrels of their flintlocks and cap guns. It was a most uncomfortable time, and worse was to follow.

The drumming sounded louder as we advanced, and the monotonous chant of some weird sacrificial song could be heard, followed by a chorus sung by several voices. At intervals the awful screams of some poor wretch as he was being dispatched punctuated the chorus. Evidently the deaths died by Kamalu's victims were not pleasant ones, and the thought of it nearly made me sick.

It would not have taken much to make my party turn and flee. And I could hardly have blamed them if they had, for those awful screams were bloodcurdling as they came through the bush in the dark.

I whispered instructions to hasten the advance, and presently we emerged into a small clearing flooded with bright moonlight. Right in front of us, about twenty yards away, I saw a low, native hut, with the usual walls of beaten mud and palm-leaf roof. In one side of this was an open doorway, through which I saw the light of a fire. Now was the time, I thought, to expect a fusillade, and I prepared to meet my Waterloo. But nothing happened, and the monotonous beating of the tom-toms went on, it and the chanting now sounding quite clear.

Beckoning the others to follow me at a run with heads down, I made a dash in silence to the open doorway and through it to the one long room the hut contained, another awful scream piercing the air just as we crossed the threshold. Oh, to catch that fiend in human shape and his foul acolytes!

We were now only a few yards away from the place of torture, but still we had encountered no one. Any noise we might have made was drowned by the drumming and the screams of the dying. The fire whose light I had seen was burning brightly a few yards away from a second doorway, in front of which hung a loosely woven grass mat. On each side of this I could see by the light of the flickering flames two highly coloured, cheap German oleographs, which are sold in the trading establishments and bought eagerly by the natives. They were about three feet by two, and one represented "Christ walking on the sea," and the other "Lazarus being raised from the dead." Both these pictures were framed in double rows of human skulls, minus the lower jaws. Surely the most incongruous framing that could have been possible.

With the exception of a couple of logs of wood, evidently used as seats—for they were polished black from the constant rubbing of many bare skins—a couple of carved stools, some earthenware pots and an old drum, the place was empty; there being no signs of any killing having been done there.

My men were shaking with excitement, and so was I. Lifting the grass mat I saw an aperture of about four and a half feet in height and three feet wide, which appeared to be the mouth of a tunnel some ten yards in length. I could see the light of another fire at the end of it, and from its roof hung a number of bells of all shapes and sizes. These were evidently intended to give warning of the approach of any unauthorized persons, so that they could be arrested before penetrating into the innermost shrine.

In a tense whisper I told my men to bend down, so as to avoid knocking against any of the bells, and to follow me closely. But I believe we might have set the whole lot ringing without giving an alarm, so great was the pandemonium at the end of the passage.

I told my crowd to do as I did but not to shoot to kill. Then I assumed the lead, and the few seconds it took to reach the end of the passage seemed like hours. Just before emerging I took in the scene, which I could see clearly by the light of the big fire, and it will always remain photographed in my brain. There were numerous brown legs in rapid motion, moving round and round to the rhythm of several tom-toms beaten by stark-naked natives, whose bodies glistened in the firelight from the sweat caused by their exertions. I had a nasty feeling that I was alone, and that my followers had in the circumstances thought discretion the better part of valour. But a fleeting glance behind showed me that they were close to me.

The scene really beggars description. Imagine a space flanked by walls about six feet in height, about twenty yards in length, closed at one end by the house through which we had passed by means of the tunnel, and at the other end by the flanged trunk of a gigantic cotton tree, which filled the whole width of the enclosure. Through one of the flanged buttresses a hole about three feet by three feet six had been cut, and over it hung a grass mat. This, I found out later, was the aperture through which victims were brought into the place of torture.

The big fire was between me and the opening, and on the right was a small, lean-to hut, built against the wall of the square, and open in front.

Under the shelter of this roof sat the most appallingly hideous figure I had ever seen. Its face was invisible, being covered by the upper portion of a tightly-fitting costume made of native-woven rope fibre. The ends of this costume at the wrists and ankles were fringed with small bells, while the dress itself was painted in black and yellow stripes, giving a tigerish appearance. The head-dress was made from the tail feathers of a fish eagle, arranged in the shape of a fan.

But the horrible appearance of this creature was in his eyes and mouth, which could be seen through the openings cut in the face covering. They were lurid-looking eyes that flashed red in the firelight like those of some savage beast, while the mouth was twisted into a sort of grin which showed yellow fangs, four of them being large and sharp like those of a leopard.

In one hand this creature held a long, sharp matchet, or cutlass, the handle of which was adorned with quantities of feathers, now stained red by the blood that had run down the blade. In the other was a sort of sceptre: an iron rod with numerous branches each terminating in a small bell. The main stem was covered with a gummy substance like beeswax, and in that were embedded cowrie shells, human teeth, the skulls of young goats, and it was crowned on top by a human skull to which the lower jaw had been loosely tied, so that when the sceptre was shaken the teeth rattled together, giving the impression that the dead thing was talking.

I am able to give this description and that of the ju-ju which follows because I took the things away with me as trophies, and was able to study them afterwards at my leisure.

The ju-ju itself was a sphere, about six feet in circumference, composed of all sorts of rubbish stuck together with a kind of wax. In it were bits of human skulls, teeth, finger and toe bones, bloodstained rags, feathers from various birds and egg-shells. Its weight might have been twenty pounds. This was placed at the feet of the seated figure, which was, of course, Kamalu, the head priest.

Besides the four musicians of the orchestra, who were squatting to the left of Kamalu, there were four acolytes, who were clothed like their chief, but not quite so elaborately, in native string costumes. They all held long, cruel-looking knives and long whips made of cane, and were evidently the torturers.

The dancers were about twenty in number, all stark naked; and they pranced madly round a small tree, to which was tied a poor wretch who was evidently the latest prospective victim of the sitting, their black bodies drenched with the perspiration which ran down them in streams, and added its odour to the general stench that prevailed. Their legs were bespattered with freshly shed blood from four dismembered human trunks that lay on the ground beside the ju-ju man. These trunks had many marks on them—looking to me as though the unfortunate creatures had been flogged to death—and were probably intended for the consumption of the guests at the conclusion of the ceremonies.

At the side of the fire were two iron pots, and in each were two human heads gently simmering. They, without doubt, had been recently severed from the four trunks. Okoro told me afterwards that the "soup" thus made would have been drunk by all those present; and that Kamalu would have added the skulls and lower jaws to the already large collection that gave additional power to the ju-ju.

But to get on with the yarn. It has taken longer to tell what I saw than I did to grasp it from where I stood—about a couple of feet inside the passage, and invisible to the group around the fire. Really I paused only a few seconds before I leaped into the square, at the same time giving vent to a series of yells such as I had heard the Australian aborigines do when they attacked. I also fired three shots from my revolver in rapid succession into the air. This was the signal for a regular fusillade from my followers, who rushed after me, howling like a lot of hyenas.

I cannot to this day help wondering why some of us were not hit in the back, and it would have been a miracle if a few at any rate of the assembled crowd were not shot; for when a native, trained or otherwise, gets behind a gun one is never sure what will happen. It is possible that some of the priests and dancers were wounded, but I did not know—and cared little.

As we bounded yelling and shooting into the arena the dancers stopped dead, and after one look in my direction, shouted in chorus: "Abaja-Aka onu bir," meaning that "the hairy man has come." Then they rushed, not at me as I had feared they might, but to the nearest points of the wall, over which they scrambled in far less time than it takes me to tell you.

In other circumstances their antics, as they struggled for precedence at the lower parts of the wall, climbing over each other's heads and stamping on each other's faces, would have been laughable; but I had no time to be amused just then, for the yard was empty in about four seconds, except for my party, Kamalu, and the victim at the stake.

The ju-ju man might have succeeded in effecting his escape also had he not been hampered by his robes of office, coupled I suppose with the stiffness of anno domini. As it was he was making frantic efforts to scale the wall when I made one blind rush for him, scrambling and slipping over the patch of gory mud, and just succeeded in grasping him by the ankle before I fell. I held on, shouting to my followers, and Kamalu clung to the top of the wall, also shouting to his followers, cursing them for deserting him, and breathing threats of future vengeance—at least so it seemed, for I could not understand his words.

The four Hausa carriers came to my assistance. They hauled the old beast from the wall and rolled him in the mud, where he was quickly trussed up and escape made impossible.

I told the police to keep on howling, and to fire occasional shots into the dense bush that surrounded the place on three sides, so as to keep the crowd on the run; then instructed Banigo to cut the bonds of the poor wretch at the stake.

Meanwhile the carriers and I were having a lively time with the old savage we had captured. He fought like a fiend, kicking, scratching and trying to bite us. To stop this I tore off one of the carrier's loin-cloths and used it as a gag, for I did not relish the idea of a bite from the foul yellow fangs, as they might have been poisonous from the carrion he doubtless ate.

When our prisoner was powerless to struggle any more I had time to look round, and remembered that I should require evidence for the trial of my prisoner. I therefore gave instructions to collect all the relics of the orgy, human and otherwise, as quickly as possible, as I wanted to be away in case the runaways rallied and came to the assistance of their chief.

We gathered up the ju-ju paraphernalia, including the sceptre, bloodstained swords, the ju-ju itself, and the pots containing the simmering heads—first pouring out the "soup." All these I gave to the carriers to bring along, and put Kamalu in charge of Banigo and the four constables. Then I gave orders to return as quickly as possible by the way we had come.

Our prisoner gave the police a lot of trouble to get him through the tunnel, as it was so narrow. But they dragged him along with the assistance of some pieces of tie-tie that had served to bind the victims to the stake, and that took a bit of the fight out of him. I stayed behind to put a match to the thatch of the house, and when we retreated down the bush path the place was ablaze.

Perhaps I should not have done this, because a certain amount of evidence was destroyed, but it gave me great satisfaction at the time, and, I think, added considerably to my prestige in the District, for it made the people believe that my ju-ju was the stronger, and able easily to overcome that of Kamalu, which was unable to protect either its priest or its home from me.

We kept on moving until we had passed through the small Anang village, meeting no opposition. At the rest house in the village of Erriam I called a halt, and then removed the cloth from Kamalu's head, for I did not want to suffocate the old blighter.

If looks could kill I should have fallen dead on the spot. He glared at me with his cruel, bloodshot eyes, gnashing his yellow teeth with fury. Then, overcome by impotent rage, he started to scream, so I gagged him again, this time with my handkerchief, in such a way that he could breathe without discomfort.

After readjusting the loads and bestowing a little judicious praise on the members of my party for the good work they had done, I looked round for the prospective victim of the ju-ju, whom I had rescued, but could see nothing of him. Banigo told me that after cutting the bonds he had come to my assistance, and had seen nothing more of the poor devil, who had evidently gone while he thought the going good, either through the tunnel or over the wall. Anyway I never saw him again, though I made exhaustive inquiries afterwards, for I needed him to give evidence. I can only suppose he was so scared that he could not distinguish between friends and enemies. But probably he ran right into the arms of the escaped ju-ju men, who would in that case have carried out the work I had interrupted.

III

THE KAMALU JU-JU (*continued*)

OUR progress was very slow indeed on the way back to Oloko, owing to Kamalu's refusal to walk; and by the time we had gone a little more than half-way we could get him no farther—the police being tired out with their efforts to persuade him. I was feeling pretty done up as well and quite ready to take a rest; so I sent Dick, who appeared to be the freshest of the party, on ahead with instructions to the corporal whom I had left behind to send ten fresh carriers and a rope hammock back to me as quickly as possible. Then I had Mr. Kamalu fastened to a tree with some tie-tie, seeing that the knots were well and truly made, and allowing him sufficient length to lie down and sleep if he wished.

Then we all lay down in a circle round him to await the arrival of the carriers.

Very soon every one except Kamalu and myself was asleep, and I envied them. Tired as I was, sleep was never farther from me, and I had nothing to do but watch the ju-ju man's smouldering red eye, which hardly ever left my face. My wrist watch had stopped, as in the excitement of the night I had forgotten to wind it; but I judged that it would be about four o'clock.

I had now no fear of any reprisals, for we were well out of the ju-ju's immediate sphere of influence, so could rest without being worried by the necessity of remaining on the alert. But time dragged, and it seemed many hours before, shortly after daylight, the carriers arrived with the hammock. Dick was with them too. Evidently having been "on the hunt" he wanted to be "in at the kill."

I told off four of the fresh men to carry the trophies, and kept the rest to carry Kamalu in relays. We rolled the old beast into the hammock, sewing him securely to the netting in spite of his violent struggles and protests. He looked an extraordinary sight thus trussed up in his now bedraggled dress, more like a mummy than the living devil in human form that he was.

All the members of the expedition were now in high spirits, each telling the others of his own prowess, and how it was due to him alone that Kamalu had been captured. But they would have made short work of the prisoner if I had not watched them. I could see they did not like the job of carrying him. But we made good time after the refreshing little rest, though I was still very tired, and infernally thirsty. In the hurry and bustle of starting I had forgotten my flask, so had nothing to drink. I envied my people, who could safely drink from the pools of "bush water" we occasionally came across. Had I done this, as I was strongly tempted to do at times, it would probably have meant an attack of dysentery, which, situated as I was far away from any chance of medical attendance, would likely have been fatal. So I nursed my thirst with thoughts of long draughts of cooling liquids.

Soon we began to meet numbers of natives on their way to their farms; and when Banigo informed them that Abaja-Aka had caught the noted ju-ju man they were at first incredulous, so assured had they been of his powers to protect himself. But when they saw they were convinced, and there was great rejoicing. The news spread rapidly, being sent to all parts by means of drumming, a method of conveying news these people are experts at. I doubt if there was much work done on the farms that day, the downfall of the "terror" being made the occasion of great rejoicings; much dancing and tumbo-drinking being the order of the day.

At the bottom of the hill on which the Oloko native court is situated I halted to give Kamalu a drink at a stream of clear running water, and to put the column in decent array for our entry into the town; for I could see already a large gathering of chiefs and people were waiting to receive us outside the court house.

While I was doing this an amusing incident occurred. Coming down the hill on a bicycle I saw a "savvy book" man. He was got up in a white choker and clerical attire, and was apparently one of these black "parsons" who start churches in the "safe" parts of the country, solely for their own gain in most instances, as they represent no recognized missionary society. I had come across them before, and knew that most of them were hypocrites.

This one dismounted from his bicycle as he came up to me, and took off his broad-brimmed, black-felt hat with a flourish. "Good-marning, Sir," he said.

I returned his salute with the best grace I could muster—for, weary as I was, I was in no mood to greet him cordially—and asked what I could do for him. He replied, in a sort of hotch-potch of long words and pidgin-English, that he was a man of God, and was looking for a site on which to build a church in which he could teach the Gospel (chiefly to young maidens, I strongly suspected). Could I, being such a good man, show him such a site, and also give him facilities for erecting his church, together with a vicarage?

I replied—being in a grim humour—that I was delighted to meet him, and that he had come at a most opportune time, as I had in view a most suitable spot for him to establish himself.

He was very pleased at this, and positively beamed with pleasure, evidently thinking he had had an easy task to convince me of his good intentions, and doubtless had visions of himself established under my protection in a fat "living." I then told him that the late "vicar" of the "parish" I had in view had, for reasons best known to himself, to retire, and it was this gentleman, clad in his canonical robes, who now reposed in the hammock. Also that these—I kicked over one of the iron pots as I spoke, and out of it rolled two parboiled human heads, one almost touching his feet—belonged to two of the late members of the congregation; or they might have been choir-boys—I did not know which.

If it is possible for the human mind to grasp two ideas simultaneously, this man's certainly did, for he turned a dirty grey, which is the nearest thing a negro can do in the way of turning pale. He realized that

I had perpetrated a grim jest and also that the neighbourhood was a very unhealthy one for him. Without saying another word he jumped on his bicycle and pedalled away for all he was worth, followed by the jeers and ribald jests of the members of my party—all except Kamalu, who kept silent behind his gag. I never saw the man again and never wanted to. Doubtless he found a place somewhere suited to his needs, and established an " abode of love " in some bush village in a safer part of the country.

When we arrived in front of the court house the carriers deposited Kamalu on the ground. He looked rather like a wild cat snared in a rabbit net as he glared impotently at all and sundry; and his reception by the chiefs was rather a mixed one, many edging away and finding urgent business to attend to elsewhere; while others remained to gaze in astonishment, mixed with incredulity.

Then one of the more enlightened of the chiefs called out to me: " Abaja-Aka, though you have caught Kamalu you will never be able to keep him, n'dewo." The last word being a warning, and its meaning as nearly as it can be translated being, " watch your step."

But I heeded not the warning at all. I had my prisoner bound securely and removed, not to the ordinary court-house lock-up, but to a small room attached to the rest house, used as a storeroom and therefore strongly built and fitted with a good lock. There I could keep an eye on him myself. Had I not done this I have not the smallest doubt but that he would have persuaded some of the guards to release him, by playing upon their fears, and would have been missing in the morning.

Before placing the guard I had him fed. He snatched at the food with his mouth like a wild animal, and tried to bite the hand of the constable who fed him.

Then, before taking a hot bath and food, I wrote to my assistant at Bende, instructing him to come to Oloko as quickly as possible and bring with him every available policeman, together with arms and ammunition, and a field telephone that was in the store at my headquarters. I sent this letter by a court messenger cyclist, who had orders to "go like the wind" and to stop nowhere by the way.

After this I tackled breakfast, but had very little appetite. A hot bath, however, revived me, and I got a little sleep, though continually disturbed by the noise Kamalu was making. He kept up a continuous stream of abuse, cursing me, the police, and the villagers, threatening what he would do to us when he was free. Later the police guard told me that he had offered them many young wives, herds of cows and flocks of goats, if they would let him escape. They were rather contemptuous when they reported this, for the fact that the supposedly powerful ju-ju man begged them to do what he evidently could not do himself in spite of all his supernatural knowledge made them think that perhaps after all he was not quite the formidable person he would have them suppose. So Kamalu really lost prestige by trying to bribe his guards.

After an anxious night, during which I slept but little, having the safety of the prisoner on my mind, the ju-ju man was still there. Several chiefs called in the morning, and seemed to be surprised at finding this so. They apparently had fully expected that he would have vanished into thin air during the night. But I kept them at a distance, telling them that the police had orders to fire at anyone approaching the prisoner, so they went away and I had no more visitors that day.

Later Banigo came to tell me that Okoro, the court messenger, was missing. At first I imagined that another ju-ju had got him, and was considerably disturbed. Then I found that his wives, children, and most of his household goods were also missing, and concluded from this that he had thought it safer to be far away. I never saw him again; probably he went to live with some of his numerous "ogoms," or relatives-in-law. By his going I lost my principal witness against Kamalu, and I wished I had placed a guard over him as well as over the prisoner. Why I had not done so was because I expected him to realise that he was safe enough where he was, now that the power of the ju-ju was broken. It was certainly a bit of bad luck, and most annoying.

By midday my assistant, Captain Norton-Harper, arrived with seventeen well-armed police, all very tired after having made a forced march with very little time to prepare, on receipt of my letter.

After explaining to Norton-Harper, a brave young fellow who, I regret to say, was killed in East Africa during the war after having greatly distinguished himself, being several times mentioned in dispatches, I told him to get food and sleep.

Then, when he was sufficiently refreshed, I told him of my plans, at which he was delighted, hoping to have what he called "some fun."

I must tell you that shortly before the time of which I am speaking a single telegraph line had been constructed between Ikot-Ekpene and Bende, thus connecting the latter place to Calabar. This line passed about a couple of hours' march from Oloko. I determined to tap this line so as to get into telephonic communication with Itu, which place I had heard the High Commissioner was visiting. It was with this object in view that I had sent for the field telephone.

Kamalu I now handed over to the tender care of Norton-Harper and the seventeen police. I took the apparatus to the nearest point of the telegraph line, and after some difficulty got into touch with the District Commissioner at Ikot-Ekpene. But it was late, and all I could get him to do was to promise to clear the line for me in the early morning. I asked also that a telegram might be sent to the High Commissioner, informing him that I wished to speak to him on an important matter.

By six o'clock the next morning I was through to my chief, and soon had the situation explained. "Capital, capital," he said. "Keep the fellow safe."

I then proceeded to tell him it was important that the ju-ju place should be razed to the ground, trees and all, after collecting all available evidence, as I was by no means sure that the remaining members of the ju-ju, under the priests still at large, would not take some action to re-establish their credit. They could easily do so if left time enough to mature their plans. I pointed out that there was a certain amount of risk to be incurred in going back to the place, and that it might be necessary to do some shooting. It was for that reason that I required his sanction to proceed in the matter.

He would not agree to this, wishing me to wait until troops could be sent up, as he did not consider I had sufficient force at my disposal.

Whereupon I pointed out that the longer the business was delayed the more trouble and expense there was likely to be. Then he agreed that I might take such action as I thought necessary, provided that I could do it with the force at my disposal, and provided also that there should be no bloodshed. There were several more "ifs" which I forget now, all except the final one, which was, "if" I failed and made a mess of things I must accept full responsibility. This meant that I might possibly be ankle-deep in the *consommé*. But in spite of this I determined to go ahead with the job—one never gets anywhere without taking risks.

On my return to Oloko I put the situation before Norton-Harper. He was all for getting on with the job, and was very anxious for the "fun."

Thereupon I gave the necessary orders, and by nine o'clock we were ready to march. My little column consisted of twenty-one armed police, under a sergeant, seven court messengers with matchets and clubs, about fifty carriers and our personal servants, together with Banigo and the interpreter.

I was puzzled at first to know what to do with Kamalu. I could not leave him in the lock-up at

Oloko, for he would not have been long in persuading the chiefs to release him. He could certainly put the fear of "queer things" into the hearts of the people of the place. Nor could I send him to Bende under escort. That would have reduced my already small force too much.

The only thing to do, therefore, was to carry the old bird along with us. We could always use him as a hostage if we got into a tight place. Banigo, with his usual thoroughness, strongly recommended cutting off the blighter's head at once; it would save a lot of trouble, he said, and there would not be any possibility of escape then. There were, however, legal objections to my taking such a course. There were also Kamalu's objections, for he had overheard Banigo's suggestion. They were loud and deep and lasted a long time, during which he got in quite a lot of useful—or useless—curses. When he heard that he was to be taken back to his own ju-ju grove he absolutely foamed at the mouth, thinking doubtless that he was to be dealt with there according to the usual methods of that establishment. I did not give him the information; but he did not lack for that, since the ordinary African has no scruples about jeering at a fallen foe. I could not stop this taunting of the prisoner, unless I took charge of him personally, and that was hardly possible if I was to lead the column to a successful termination of the enterprise. Anyway, he absolutely refused to walk, and had to be sewn up again in the network hammock.

As far as the small Anang village we made good progress. But just outside of this I had to anticipate possible opposition. I therefore threw out " flankers " on each side of the path, and a " point " of three men ahead. I came next with the interpreter and Banigo, more police, Kamalu in his net, and then Norton-Harper, who was followed by a rear-guard of four police.

Nothing happened until we reached the cleared space in the middle of the village, fronting which was the " palaver shed," or village meeting-place, a mud-walled, thatched building open on three sides. In front of this were seated some twenty or thirty strapping young men, naked except for their girded-up loin-cloths.

I knew that this fashion of wearing their cloths was used when any " trouble " was expected; and that they were there to make " trouble " was further indicated by the fact that they all had bags made of monkey skins hung over their shoulders. These bags I recognized as part of their " war " equipment. They contained powder, caps and slugs for loading cap guns; and these guns I was certain could not be far away, probably " piled " in the shed behind.

I had swung round the corner of the bush right into full view of the group, and they were utterly taken by surprise. So much so that they made absolutely no move of any sort when I approached, just sitting and staring at me in a helpless kind of way. It seemed to me that they lacked a leader to tell them what to do, and that they had been called together by some one who had let them down, possibly because my approach had been spotted.

Anyway, they remained immobile as I came up;

and at about twenty yards from them I called a halt, making the carriers ground their loads and sit down. Then I placed ten of the police in a semicircle, lying down with their rifles at the ready, so as to form a rear-guard; the remainder I placed in between the carriers and the shed.

I then told Norton-Harper that I intended to engage the young men in conversation with the object of making them see reason if possible. While I was doing this he was to detail three or four of the police to slip quietly in between them and the shed, and that the signal for doing this would be when I invited the would-be warriors to look at their pet ju-ju man.

He was very keen to do this himself, as there was a certain amount of danger. The young men had their matchets handy and might make a rush if fear made them desperate. But I could not allow him to leave Kamalu, who might easily frighten some of the carriers into releasing him.

I was anxious to avoid any blood-letting, and intended to use strategy and a display of force rather than force itself.

During these preparations the young men made no move, but sat still looking apprehensively in my direction. It would have needed very little to make them attack or to stampede them, and I did not want either of these to happen.

Telling my boy to bring my camp chair, I walked forward, accompanied by the interpreter (a native of Bonny named Jumbo), until I was within five or six yards of the "enemy." Then, with as much sang-froid as I could muster, I sat down; though I must admit to a certain amount of nervousness. Jumbo was even more so, as his knees were knocking together and his cheeks shaking like jellies. But he stuck to his post. Behind me Norton-Harper was keeping an eye on Kamalu, who had been placed in full view of his "army." But from that distance it was hardly possible that the ju-ju man could be recognized.

I lighted my pipe—an act of pure bravado—and beckoned to the young men to come to me. But they made no move to obey the signal. I then shouted "Attente" (listen) and addressed them through Jumbo, telling him to speak clearly and distinctly in Ibo so that I could follow him. I told them I had not come to make war, but that I was Abaja-Aka, about whom they must have heard, and nothing would happen to them if they did as I told them. But if they did not, I could and would make plenty of trouble for them.

They listened to this attentively, still not moving, but with all their eyes fixed on my face. I had their interest, so proceeded to tell them that I—Abaja-Aka—had defied and overcome their powerful ju-ju, had captured their high priest and had no intention of ever letting him go. I added that if they did not believe me they could go and look at him from a respectful distance. But if they attempted to approach too near the guns would go off, and so would Kamalu's head.

There was some show of whispered conversation among them when I had finished speaking, but no attempt was made to approach me, so I had the net containing Kamalu moved a little nearer. Then, after a few more minutes, they became inquisitive, as

I had hoped they would. First two or three of the bolder ones moved forwards, their eyes staring at the wriggling mass in the network. Then others followed, until all were well clear of the front of the palaver shed.

From where I sat I could see, from out of the corner of my eye, the stealthy movements of four police constables as they stole quietly towards the space in front of the shed, thus separating the young men from their arms while they were busy staring in astonishment at the trussed-up ju-ju man.

As soon as the police had taken up their positions, with their backs to the shed and their rifles with fixed bayonets at the ready, I started again to address the young warriors, asking them if they were satisfied that I had the terror-inspiring priest in my power. They were much too taken aback to make any reply to this, so I told them to go and get their guns—if they could—from the palaver shed, at the same time rising to my feet and pointing dramatically to the four police in front of me.

The astonishment in their faces when they saw how they had been outwitted was really laughable. They stood between the devil and the deep sea as it were, not knowing in which direction to run.

I ordered them to sit down, and this time they obeyed me. Then I gave them a good tongue-thrashing, talking to them as one would to children, and telling them how foolish they had been to attempt anything against Abaja-Aka, who was far too powerful to be overthrown. They were very humble indeed when I had finished with them, and would have licked my boots had I wished them to do so.

I selected the most intelligent-looking one amongst them to be their spokesman and told him to inform them that, now they had realized how foolish they had been, and now that the Kamalu ju-ju was broken and destroyed for ever, they had nothing to fear but my anger. Further, I should require them, in order to show their good faith, to assist me in destroying what was left of the ju-ju grove, and this they assured me they would do.

I did not, of course, really require their services, my idea being that once they had definitely committed themselves in a hostile act against the ju-ju, it would thereafter be against their interests to allow or assist any of the other priests to re-establish themselves.

The police, obeying my orders, then collected the guns. These were about twenty-five in number, and were of all shapes and makes: matchlocks, flintlocks, cap guns, and a couple of Snider rifles, all of them being loaded. I told the now subdued warriors that they would have no further use for them in future, as I would protect their village from aggression.

Then I took possession of the shed to shelter the carriers and their loads and, much against Banigo's advice, allowed my new friends to have their matchets as an earnest of my faith in them.

All being in order, and a guard placed over the loads, we set off for the ju-ju grove, taking along Kamalu, so that he could see the last of his stronghold.

As we neared the place a most abominable stench assailed our nostrils, easily recognizable as that of putrefying bodies. The house of the pictures and the tunnel were still-smouldering heaps of charred ruins. In the yard where the sacrifices had been carried out all was as I had left it. The four headless bodies were still there, but were now swollen to double their size, while swarms of flies buzzed around and over them. They accounted for the appalling stench.

As quickly as possible I got to windward of them, and had them dragged into Kamalu's "throne room." Then I ordered all the available half-charred wood to be piled on top and set fire to the lot.

What old Kamalu's feelings were when he saw his place burning I neither knew nor cared. He was an unwilling spectator, and I was determined that he should see the thing thoroughly done. There were now upwards of fifty willing hands to carry out the work of destruction, our newly-found friends being quite the most active on the job.

I had every wall levelled to the ground, and every tree in the grove felled, except the big ju-ju cotton tree, which was too big. The surrounding bush was cleared for a distance of thirty yards; and while this was being done we came across a small hut in which were sets of wooden stocks and native-made shackles. These showed signs of having been used quite recently. Evidently many a poor wretch had been imprisoned there before being dragged away for sacrifice.

I had this hut demolished; its thatch, some old mats and a stack of dry brushwood being piled around the base of the cotton tree after all hands had helped to ringbark it with their matchets.

The fire was then lighted and burned well. But it would necessarily take a considerable time before the huge tree would fall, although it was killed by the heat very quickly. I could not stay to see its finish, but knew that once the thin buttressing flanges had been burned away, very little wind would cause the dead trunk to fall.

It went against the grain to destroy so noble a tree, but it was necessary to do so, since if it had been left the natives would have thought at once that its ju-ju was strong enough to protect it, and I would probably have had to do the job over again.

Everything else having been razed to the ground, I gave the order to return to Erriam. Here I held another pow-wow, but could get absolutely nothing out of my new "friends," either in the way of evidence against Kamalu or regarding the organization that had called them together. They were palpably too frightened to break their oaths, whatever the nature of these were.

I was never able to catch any of Kamalu's assistant "priests"; they probably thought I was too dangerous for them, and left that part of the country. I suspected, however, that they were Aros, the same, very likely, as had staffed the Long Ju-ju at Aro-Chuku before its destruction.

I found out also that Kamalu was an Aro, though of low caste. But that was about all I did find out about him, for I could not succeed in tracing any of his ill-gotten gains. Probably he sent them as far away from the place of acquirement as possible. Neither did he reside in the vicinity, but came to the ju-ju grove with his followers only on the nights when the oracle was supposed to be working.

From Erriam we returned direct to Bende, and I had the satisfaction of placing Kamalu in a brick-built isolation cell in the prison at that place. There I knew he would be safe, for the prison staff were mostly foreign to the District.

Then I had to face the, to me, much more difficult task of reporting to headquarters what I had done; and in making this report I took care to give the police all the praise and credit they undoubtedly deserved; for it must be borne in mind that they were attacking not only something they could see, but an intangible, invisible something else that was very real indeed to them.

I received the usual stereotyped reply, begging to convey the thanks of His Excellency the High Commissioner for the good work done in destroying the Kamalu Ju-ju, and there the matter ended so far as I and every one else were concerned.

Kamalu was charged on several counts and remanded to the Assizes. But the evidence for the actual murder charge I was able to collect was very thin. My principal witness had decamped, and even if he had been available it is doubtful if he would have testified in court, where, of course, the methods I had used to extract information could not be applied.

I proceeded on leave after this, having had a very strenuous tour of service. But before the Assizes were held, and before leaving Bende, I took a farewell look at old Kamalu, and found he had grown quite fat and sleek on the good food he had been getting, which evidently suited him better than the "meat" diet he had been used to for so long.

The old beast glared at me like a caged wild thing, and broke out into a string of curses which, luckily for him perhaps, I could not understand, since the

Aro dialect is different from that spoken by the Ibos. But from the horrified looks on the faces of the prison warders I judged they must have been pretty bad.

He made several "snaps" at me with his teeth, gnashing them with rage when he missed. But I took care to keep well out of range. His final remark to me as I was leaving the cell was translated to me by an Aro-speaking warder, and was: "You will never be able to hang me, you ——. I will get out and then I will get you."

He was perfectly right in so far as the first part of his prophecy was concerned. The murder charge fell through when heard at the Assizes, but he was found guilty of the other charges preferred against him under the Witchcraft Ordinance, and sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

He served part of this sentence in Calabar prison; but after two years I heard he had been released on medical grounds. He died before he got back to Erriam district, though I am doubtful if he ever tried to reach that place.

I have never been able to make up my mind what Kamalu really was. Perhaps he was a madman of the sadist variety, killing merely for the love of bloodshed. Or perhaps his motives may have been solely business ones, and the ju-ju run purely for immediate gain and what could be extracted in the form of blackmail. Possibly there was something of both.

On the other hand, it might have been that he was only a figure-head, placed there by the more astute high-caste Aros, who could thus safely remain in the background.

IV

THE BLACK GOAT

THE superstitions and weird beliefs of the African natives are many and strange, especially in those far-away places which are very little visited. What I am going to relate is a very good example of the behaviour of these people when under the influence of them. I am afraid there are more "loose heads" in this chapter, and it might be thought that these incidents were more or less daily occurrences. Of course this was not the case; but naturally when they did happen they were not easily forgotten, and served to keep the rest of the circumstances fresh in my memory.

In those early days my district of Bende was quite unopened, and it was not safe to go much off the beaten track without a strong escort to make a show of force. My authority extended only a very few miles north of the headquarter-station, and beyond that, as has already been stated, lay the unexplored "bad" country, the refuge of murderers, slave-dealers, ju-ju men, and the like.

The towns through which the main routes of travel passed were fairly safe, and more or less amenable to Government control; but the influence of the chiefs of these towns did not extend very far. They lived always in fear of attack by raiding slave-dealers, and of visits by wandering ju-ju men, who got fat by terrorizing the people.

One morning when I was sitting in my bush-built office in Bende station—alone except for an old Sierra Leone clerk, the interpreter and a police orderly—writing up my monthly report, I heard a commotion outside. There was much shouting, and presently I heard the padding of bare feet rapidly approaching, together with the panting of some one breathing distressfully.

I got up from my chair and went out on to the little veranda formed by the overhanging palm-leaf roof and a low mud wall, and saw, only a few yards away, a tall native, naked except for a girded-up loin-cloth, running for all he was worth. Under his arm he carried a bundle of what looked like sacking, and it appeared to contain something fairly heavy.

Several police constables were giving chase and tongue, others endeavoured to collar the runner as he passed them. But he fended them off with his right hand as he ran, like a Rugby forward clearing the half-backs of the other side. This was probably the easier, since it was difficult to hold him, his skin being greasy with perspiration and affording no grip. Several times he was nearly stopped, but managed to wriggle clear of those who tried to hold him back.

He seemed to be so determined to reach me that the police and other members of my staff imagined that his intentions were hostile. But I saw that he was unarmed, not even carrying the matchet, without which few natives travel far from their homes, and therefore quietly waited for him, fairly certain that he had no evil intentions.

Seeing me standing in the veranda, and noticing probably that the door of the office was blocked by those who wished to stop him from reaching me, the panting runner altered his direction and came right for me, taking the two-foot wall in his stride. Immediately there was a rush of police and others to arrest him. But I held up my hand and stopped this, at the same time shouting to them to leave the man to me. They obeyed, but remained crowded together on the other side of the wall.

The poor devil now stood in front of me, his breath coming in gasps, and every muscle of his body shaking with the pounding of his heart, whose movement I could see clearly between his thinly-covered ribs. His mouth was open and his eyes staring as he struggled to speak, unsuccessfully at first.

I waited until he had recovered his wind, noticing meanwhile that he had brought with him a most unholy stench, which I imagined at first might be due to over-heated "native," but pretty bad at that. Then I asked him what he wanted.

He made no attempt to answer in words, but took the bundle from under his arm and undid it. Then he turned it mouth downwards, and out rolled two human heads, which from their appearance must have been severed from their bodies several days before, and had certainly not been kept in a cold chamber since.

One of the ghastly objects rolled to my feet, making my stomach heave with the awful smell of it. It lay face upwards in all its hideousness, with lips swollen to an abnormal size, and the eyeballs half out of their sockets, oozing foul slime. Most of the "wool" had peeled off, leaving bluish bald patches, over which maggots were crawling.

Then the perpetrator of this found his tongue. "No ogome" (my brothers), he said, pointing to the gruesome relics at my feet and looking me in the eyes. "What are you going to do about it?"

I was in no condition to answer him. All I could do was to snatch a sheet of blotting-paper that lay handy, and covering my nose with this I vaulted over the veranda wall into the purer air. I felt like being violently sick, but managed to choke down what would, in the circumstances, have been an exhibition of weakness.

Then I gave orders that the man was to be taken to the native court house, about thirty yards away, and said I would come across to hear the palaver; then instructed the police to collect the heads, which I supposed might be needed as evidence. Before going I also instructed the prison warder to set a gang of prisoners to clean and disinfect the veranda where the heads had fallen. It took some scrubbing before that awful stench was cleared, traces of it remaining for weeks afterwards on the mud floor, so that I had to move my office to another building for the time being.

Then I retired to my bungalow for a peg—a good stiff one—for I needed it badly after the efforts my unfortunate stomach had been making to turn itself inside out.

By the time I reached the native court it was packed with natives, male and female, old and young, clothed and unclothed; all eager to hear the sequel of what they had seen. A good many of them I had removed, for I had had enough of smells for a bit, and then mounted my "throne" at the far end of the building.

The runner was in better condition by this. He had been supplied with food and drink in the prison compound, and had swallowed this ravenously—like a man who had not eaten for a long time—and could speak coherently.

"My name is Apelle," he stated in answer to my questions. "I come from the town of Omo-ahia (the home of the weaver bird)." This town, about sixteen miles away, was well within the area of my influence, and had always been friendly. So I listened with greater interest, wondering what it had to do with severed heads.

"I had two brothers whom I loved," continued Apelle. "Their heads I have brought to you. Now I want the heads of those that killed them."

I told him that, before I could take any steps in the matter, he must give me further details. So he continued:

"About five days since my two brothers went into the bush to hunt. I did not go with them. They did not come back that day, and in the morning they had not returned. I went to look for them, fearing that a leopard had killed them. I searched for them all that day, and for the next two days, but could not find them. None of the people I met could tell me anything. In the evening of the third day I was searching the bush near the town of Omo-gara, when

I felt a strong smell of dead man. So I went to the place from which it came; and there, fastened to the forked branches of two ju-ju trees, I saw two heads which I recognized as those of my two brothers. Their bodies were not there. So I knew that the ju-ju men had eaten them and given their heads to the ju-ju."

The latter part of this statement was, of course, not evidence, but pure surmise on the part of the complainant. Afterwards, however, it turned out to be quite correct. He knew all about his countrymen's nice little ways; and possibly—I say it without prejudice—he had attended many a similar little festivity in the course of his life. But he naturally resented the fact that his brothers should figure as the "pièces de résistance" of revellers in another town.

"I was very much afraid they would catch me too," continued Apelle, "and I did not want to be eaten until my brothers had been avenged. So I hid in the bush until it was dark. Then, not hearing anyone about, I went and took my brothers' heads from the trees, and ran as fast as I could back to my own town. I put the heads into a sack and brought them to you as quickly as I could, knowing that Abaja-Aka does not agree with these doings, and will help me to kill the people who have murdered my brothers. No one in my town knows yet what has happened, as they were all asleep and I would not stay to wake them. It was hard to get here, because people I met asked me what 'beef' I had in my bundle, and wanted to take it from me, so I had to leave the road and come here through the bush."

I asked him how he knew that the people he suspected had done the deed.

"Because I found the heads near the town of Omo-gara, where I know there are three men staying who have made trouble for my brothers and myself on account of a woman relative of ours whom we refused to give up to their ju-ju for sacrifice. We fought them and drove them away, and as they went they swore vengeance against us. They are strong ju-ju men, and I will swear a charge against them."

According to my intelligence book the town of Omo-gara was not far from Omo-ahia, and had a good name. I had visited it myself on several occasions, and at odd times "wanted" men had been arrested there by the police without any trouble. I considered it quite safe to send constables there to effect the arrest of the murderers; so I selected two reliable members of the force, giving them instructions to apply to the head chief of Omo-ahia, and ask him to accompany them to Omo-gara, there to render any assistance that might be needed. They were not to visit any other place, and if there was any trouble they were to come straight back again and report it to me. But I did not anticipate any, since the chiefs in the two towns were generally anxious to please me.

The two constables were accompanied by Apelle, the complainant, who was to show the way and identify the suspects; also by a uniformed court messenger who carried the warrants for the arrests, and was a native of Omo-ahia, so knew the surrounding country.

The police were armed with Martini-Henry rifles, a few rounds of ammunition each, their bayonets, and the usual matchets. But they were told that their arms were only for defensive purposes, and that no force was to be attempted. They were to work entirely through the chiefs, who would be responsible to me that the suspects were delivered up.

It was about ten o'clock when the party set out, and I expected they would probably be back again with their prisoners some time the following day. So I gave the matter no further thought—it being a common enough occurrence sending out to make arrests in this manner.

The next morning I was aroused from my slumbers before daybreak by a commotion outside. And on getting up to find out the cause of it, I saw quite a crowd of excited people around my bungalow, and the flickering of several hurricane lamps. Some of the men I recognized as police, though they were not in uniform.

As soon as I appeared the sergeant came forward, bringing with him one of the constables I had sent away the day before. This man was in a horrid mess. His uniform—or the remains of it—was in rags. He was covered with mud and dust, and had an ugly scalp wound which, to judge by the amount of congealed blood on his face and neck, must have been a very severe one. He also had several matchet wounds on his arms and legs, and was minus his rifle, ammunition pouch, belt and cap. Evidently he had had a nasty time of it.

It took me some time to get out of him what had happened. But at length I managed to piece together his story.

It appeared that he, the other constable and the court messenger, had allowed themselves to be persuaded by Apelle into going to Omo-gara direct without first proceeding to Omo-ahia as I had instructed them. On their arrival at that place they found that the murderers they had come to arrest were not in the town, but had fled to another called Omo-nkiti-utcha (the home of Nkita the dog and his wife Utcha). This town I knew had a very bad reputation, and had not at that time been visited by any District Commissioner. It was down on my list to be tackled as soon as I could muster a sufficient escort to make a show of force.

The constables had called upon the chiefs of Omo-gara to go with them to this town to help them to make the arrests. But they had refused to do this, saying it was too dangerous, and endeavoured to dissuade the constables from going.

But these had gone on despite this advice, again disobeying the instructions I had given them, the reason apparently being the persuasive powers of Apelle, who was so keen to avenge his brothers' death that I suppose it made him eloquent. Doubtless the constables also thought of the " kudos " they would get if the arrest came off. And it might have been that they were so accustomed to the people always fearing uniformed and armed police, as the representatives of the supposed long arm of Abaja-Aka, that they imagined they would have a comparatively easy task.

In this case, however, they were sadly disillusioned. Having passed the boundary between the lands of

Omo-gara and Omo-nkita-utcha, they were set upon by a number of young warriors from the latter town, who were armed with cap and flintlock guns, matchets and spears. They were soon overcome and disarmed, the two constables being caught, tied up, and taken to the town amid great rejoicings and songs of victory. The court messenger and Apelle, the cause of the disaster, managed to make their escape.

The two captured men were taken to the palaver house of the town, deprived of the rest of their equipment, and very roughly used. Then, amidst much dancing, drinking of tumbo and general excitement, a meeting of ju-ju men was held in order to decide upon the particular kind of sticky death the prisoners should die. These unfortunates, being present, heard the whole of this discussion.

Eventually it was agreed to postpone the executions and the accompanying festivities until the following day—it being then rather late and the night moonless. But a decision had to be arrived at as to what was to be done then, and it was arranged that the fate of the constable who was telling the story would be to be blinded and then tied down over the nest of some driver ants until the savage little insects had eaten him alive. His companion was to be burned alive in the town square, and his charred skull given to the ju-ju. There were some protests at this waste of good meat, and the objectors carried the day for a roast.

As soon as an agreement had been reached on these important matters the prisoners were bound securely with tie-tie, and thrown into an empty hut, to be left there while more drinking of tumbo was indulged in.

During the early part of the night the narrator had, with the help of nails and teeth, managed to free himself from his bonds and, having made a hole in the mat roof of the hut, effected his escape; but was evidently in too much of a hurry—or too afraid of recapture—to stay and release his comrade, whom he left to his fate.

He could not have wasted much time on the way back to Bende, and must have run all the way, despite his wounds. He was very emphatic, however, in saying that, unless something could be done quickly, it would not be very long before the other constable would be roasting alive for the delectation of the assembled townspeople.

There was only one thing to be done, and it would have to be done at once. I must go and rescue this man if I could. Shouting orders as I dressed, I soon had fifteen constables assembled (I had only twenty-three all told in the station), with their rifles and fifteen rounds of ammunition each. Ten station labourers I took as carriers, to follow with my camp equipment, chop boxes and servants. Also I had two court messengers and the interpreter. One of the police carried bandages, oil and other dressings; and with these I started on my errand of rescue.

My "army" was just as keen to be in time as I was, and we reached Omo-gara in less than three hours. It was good going, considering the narrow and winding bush paths we had to negotiate, and the obstacles we had to surmount. But we were travelling light, and were determined that nothing should delay us.

At Omo-gara everyone was in a state of excitement; the whole town was astir. The chiefs met me wringing their hands and whining like a lot of dogs; praying that I would not blame them for what had happened. I cursed them roundly, but did not stop to argue with them, guessing that already secret messengers—probably relatives-in-law, or "ogoms," of some of the Omo-nkiti-utcha people—had gone to give warning of my approach, and I was not very certain as to whether the news would hasten or delay what was to be done to the unfortunate constable.

Nothing would persuade any of the Omo-gara people to come with me. One old chief begged and prayed me not to go, and thought me mad to persist in such a dangerous enterprise with the handful of police I had with me. I was inclined to agree with him that it *was* a mad thing to do; but needs must; I could not let my policeman be burned alive without attempting something to stop the business.

We had not gone far along the road to Omo-nkiti-utcha before some of the older chiefs and their retinues caught us up, and again begged that we would not go; as we would be all tortured, killed and eaten; for these were bad, bad people.

I knew that their anxiety to stop me was not altogether due to disinterested regard for me. They were sufficiently knowledgeable to know that if anything happened to me they might be blamed for not volunteering to go along with me; and would have stopped me by force, only they had not the courage to act on their own initiative in such a serious matter.

Then the patriarch of the party spoke up. He was a ju-ju man in a mild sort of way—possibly he had not always been mild—and he told of omens. If I should meet a white goat all would be well, he said. But if the animal should be black, then I must return at once without passing it, for it would be a sure sign that I, and all my escort, would be killed.

I told him to go to the devil, or its equivalent in the Ibo tongue, and pushed on. Evidently the old fellow knew that the Omo-nkiti-utcha people's ju-ju was a black goat, and that there would be one somewhere outside the town. I was annoyed with him for trying to frighten my people; for they would be frightened if the ju-ju element came in, though they were not afraid, under my leadership, to face a whole town full of fighting men.

Our objective was about three miles from Omogara, and when we had done about half that distance I halted the party to give the order to load rifles and fix bayonets. I had my six-shooter, and my trusty Winchester was carried, fully loaded, by the interpreter. I had no instructions to give—the time for these would come when I knew exactly what I was up against—except that there was to be no shooting until I gave the word.

From where we were I could see the beginnings of the yam farms belonging to the town, and knew we were approaching the boundary, or line of demarcation, between the lands belonging to the two places.

We reached this without incident and struck more or less open country, except for a strip of bush, which might have been the ju-ju place where the two constables were set upon and caught. I had this place investigated, to make sure that there was no ambush, but found nothing except a few rags and half-decayed animals' entrails. But still there might have been—and somehow I felt there were—cruel, cunning eyes watching us from every angle.

We had now slackened our pace somewhat, so as to keep well together, moving cautiously with every man on the alert, rifles at the "ready," in case of a surprise attack. As we got nearer to the town we could hear the muffled beating of drums and the chanting of solos and choruses. I then began to fear we would be too late to stop the feast and save the unfortunate prisoner from a horrible death, and that the news of my coming had hastened the business, instead of delaying it as I had been beginning to hope.

Presently the path broadened, and right ahead it ran through a fine avenue of magnificent oil-bean trees, behind which were plantations of yam and cassava. Once we reached this there would be less danger of being ambushed, for it was possible to see fairly clearly for a good distance on each side.

During the latter part of the march I had forgotten all about the old chief's warning, my attention being concentrated upon the exigencies of the situation and the possibility of being attacked. But I was reminded of it very sharply when the two constables who formed the advance guard suddenly stopped, and I could see something had scared them.

I went on, and as I came up to them I saw they were gazing with horror-stricken eyes at a large black goat, which was tied by its horns to trees on each side with a rope that stretched across the track we were following. So tightly was the animal fastened that he could not move more than a foot in any direction.

When it saw us it naturally tried to get away, but finding this impossible it reared on its hind legs and bleated loudly. This seemed to have a most demoralizing effect on my previously bold "warriors." Here was something they really feared; for they had all heard the words of the old chief. It represented to them something that no human courage or audacity could overcome. It was the guardian, or ju-ju spirit of the town, and its powers had been foretold.

When the rest of my men came up they also stopped and looked at this awful manifestation of the unseen. They crowded together, whispering in awe-stricken accents, and it looked as if very little would stampede them into a wild rush for safety. Even the interpreter, who was by way of being an educated man, was nearly as bad as the rest of them; and it looked as though I might be left to face the music alone, or else have to join ignominiously in the general flight. I felt inclined to beat him for his foolishness, but remembered that the veneer of education hardly ever eradicates beliefs that are ingrained through generations of superstition.

I am afraid I used a lot of bad language in this emergency. But no amount of "cursing" would make any of the party go any nearer to the old goat. Something more than persuasion of this sort was needed, and I had to think quickly.

Then I made my decision. The animal must be "sacrificed." I must take its innocent life to save that of a human being. Seizing a sharp matchet from one of the men I made a rush at the goat, and with one blow I nearly severed its head from its body.

The looks of horror on the faces of my retainers at the sight of this dreadful deed was the kind of sight one does not forget. They were petrified, frozen with terror, and waited hopelessly for the doom they fully expected would at once overtake them.

But I could not wait for what they expected, and gave my orders in a loud authoritative voice, which they obeyed in an automatic way. I formed them into a hollow square, facing the goat and the town, and told them to shoot on sight anyone approaching from that direction.

Then I instructed the carriers, who had now come up, to bring dry wood and make a fire on the path. This they did, obeying me but shaking with fright the while. The goat was by this time quite dead; so I decapitated it completely and stuck the head on a stick in the middle of the path. After this I told them to skin the carcase and prepare it for cooking. But this they absolutely refused to do, not by word of mouth, but by standing with staring eyes as though they had not heard me.

There was nothing for it but to do the work myself, so I set to and soon had the skin off. It was not a well-done job and would have earned me censure if I had so botched a hide in my Queensland days. But I was working against time, and the main thing was to do the thing quickly.

As soon as the skin was clear I set to work to hack up the carcase, using a sharp matchet, and in a few minutes had cut off a goodly number of "chops." These I stuck on sticks in front of the fire, and presently the savoury odour of cooking meat impregnated the air. The carriers meanwhile stood round in fearful amazement, wondering, I suppose, why the ju-ju had not struck me dead for committing such an awful sacrilege.

I did manage to make my personal servants assist me, especially the cook, whose professional instincts were aroused, I expect, when he saw me doing his job, or trying to do it.

While waiting for the meat to cook I noticed that the drumming and singing in the town had stopped. Perhaps spies had seen and reported what I had done, and discussions, or references to the oracle, were going on as to the best way of dealing with me. I told the police to keep their eyes open and their rifles ready, then picked up one of the chops which was nearly enough cooked, and began eating it, offering others to the carriers.

I pretended to like the beastly thing as I tore off lumps of half-cooked flesh with my teeth. But in reality it nearly made me sick, and I had to force myself to swallow. Meanwhile the savoury smell was getting stronger and my people were hungry after the long march. One by one, the bolder spirits first, they began to sneak towards the fire, first looking at me to make sure that the sacrilegious feast was doing me no harm. Then they picked up the daintier morsels and started to eat, just as a bird does, glancing fearfully around after each mouthful. Soon the whole party were indulging, and there was not much left of the ju-ju goat but its bones and skin. All were roaring with laughter, not a trace of fear left. I had conquered the ju-ju, mine was the stronger.

All this had taken up more time than I could have wished, but it could not be helped, it had to be. Meanwhile the townspeople were still giving no sign of their presence. This might mean that they were preparing to attack, in which case I could only put up the best fight we could manage; but capture and death would be almost inevitable in the long run. On the other hand, my action in "eating up" the town ju-ju might have scared them stiff, caused them to bolt, and left the field open to me.

There was only one way to decide this, and that was by going to see. So I gave the word to advance. We should soon know if they had served my constable as I had served their sacred goat. My men collected the remains of the feast, chattering and laughing as they stowed away little tit-bits for future consumption, and resumed the march, eager now to reach the objective.

I gave one of the court messengers the goat's head to carry on a stick in front of me, like a banner in the van; and very proud of his job he was, in spite of the good-humoured chaff of his fellows.

The town was reached without anything further happening, and was deserted, except for fowls, goats, and a few yapping pie dogs. Not a human being was to be seen. We made for the central part, knowing that most ceremonies in African towns take place in front of the communal "palaver house." In this case the palaver house was in a compound enclosed by mud walls. I made for the entrance to this, and taking two constables with rifles pointed ready to fire at anything that moved, I went in. Just inside the entrance lay two rifles and police accoutrements, complete with the exception of the cartridge pouch of the missing man. Farther inside was the meeting house, flanked by two or three ordinary huts. In the centre of the compound was a stake, around which was a large pile of dry sticks and tree branches. Stretched across the top of this pile was the body of a native, entirely naked. My men had no difficulty in recognizing this as their missing comrade; and they soon had him off the unlit bonfire.

But the man was not dead. He had evidently been tied to the stake and for some reason had been cut adrift. He was in a semi-unconscious condition, too bewildered to know that he had been free for some time. Anyway he was alive, and apparently more or less unhurt; for this I was profoundly thankful.

After the two constables I had with me had given him a drink from their water-bottles—which I suspected contained something stronger than water—he began to sit up and take notice, and was soon nearly himself again, apart from a few cuts and bruises. We had been in time to save him, that was the main thing. Another quarter of an hour's delay before meeting with the black goat and it would have been too late to do anything but bury his charred remains.

But the town was no place to dally in. Any moment the people might recover their courage and return to attack us. The sooner we were away the safer we would be. So I gave the word to go, but without any appearance of hurry. There might have been spies watching from the bush to observe our attitude, and any symptoms of scuttling might have heartened our foes to come after us.

I left the goat's head on a stick in front of the entrance to the palaver house compound, just to show the blighters how little I cared about their ju-ju. This was not done in any spirit of bravado or spite, but because I imagined it would have a good effect on our future relations. I did not, however, get an opportunity to test this.

The rescued man was able to walk without assistance, though he was somewhat stiff at first. I noticed also that he was soon chattering to his comrades, so concluded that he did not require any of the medicaments I had brought with me. His troubles had been more mental than physical, and a native soon gets over that kind of thing, being nearer to childhood than a white man.

Just before reaching the place where I had "slain the dragon" I looked back, and saw smoke rising from the compound we had left. One of my party must have set light to the roof of one of the houses. I asked no questions, however. I knew it would be useless—for no one would have admitted the act; and in any case it was a just retribution for what had been done.

After going a couple of miles I called a halt and we had a well-earned meal. Pieces of cooked "sacrifice" were produced and eaten with much relish by the police and carriers; the released captive taking his share with the rest. When he had finished his meal I called upon him to relate his experiences, which he did, in a mixture of pidgin-English and Ibo.

After his mate had escaped from the hut in which the two had been tied up, drinking, dancing and singing went on all through the night, and it was not until after daybreak that anyone visited the prisoners. Then the ju-ju priests in their robes of office, together with their torturers and executioners, came to collect their victims, and there was much consternation among them when they found that one of them was missing. A lot of time was spent in making a search for the escaped man, and that delayed the commencement of the proceedings. After an hour or two of fruitless search a meeting was held, at which a great deal more tumbo was drunk. It was a ju-ju man's meeting, all non-members, women and children being excluded. At this it was finally decided to make the best—or worst—of a bad job, and carry on with the remaining captive. There was some argument as to whether this one should be roasted as originally intended or whether he should take the other one's place on the ant-heap. A fowl was killed, and the "reading" of its entrails decided for the original arrangement. Probably the "reader" or diviner of the signs had some thought of subsequent proceedings, and considered it foolish to waste good meat on ants.

The prisoner was then brought out of the hut, where he had been an interested listener to these deliberations, and was about to be tied to the stake in the middle of the piled-up wood, when a man came running in and gave the assembled company important news. The condemned man did not hear what it was except that my name, Abaja-Aka, was mentioned; but I gathered that this runner must have been a spy from Omo-gara bringing news of my arrival at that place.

The news caused a good deal of commotion, and another palaver was held. It was then that the town's ju-ju, the black goat, was taken from its shrine and tied up in the place where I had found it; this being done in the full belief that I would never dare to pass it.

After this preparations were made to resume the proceedings. The tying of the victim to the stake was completed, and fire sticks were being brought to ignite the pyre, when another interruption occurred. Several men appeared, all armed with cap guns and spears. They were running quickly and were very excited, shouting their news as they came. These must have been the guards that had been set to watch the baneful effect of the black goat on me and my followers.

The news they brought had a terrifying effect on all present, ju-ju men included. For not only had Abaja-Aka killed their ju-ju, but he had had the audacity to eat it—and the heavens had not fallen on him.

Many of those present refused at first to believe the dreadful intelligence. But it was confirmed by other runners, who also reported that Abaja-Aka was now on his way to their town with many soldiers. Then there was a general panic, and a sort of "sauve-qui-peut." In a very few minutes the town was empty.

The constable just remembered a man jumping up to him, flourishing a knife, and must have fainted, thinking that he was about to be slaughtered. Probably what had happened was that it had been intended at first to take the prisoner away too; but the heart of the one deputed to bring him had failed when he found himself the last one in the town, so he had followed the rest and left the prisoner as we found him.

We camped at Omo-ahia that night, and I could see by the attitude of the chiefs that my stock as a mighty ju-ju man had risen several points. The native is given to exaggerating, so I expect the tale my followers told lost nothing in the telling.

The town of Omo-nkiti-utcha was dealt with by a patrol that visited my district a few months later, and the murderers who had been the original cause of the trouble were given up. They suffered the extreme penalty for their crime, though Apelle did not get their heads.

I had never been very keen on goats' flesh, but after my enforced meal I have been unable to eat it—no matter how well it might be cooked.

V

THE HAUNTED REST HOUSE

ALTHOUGH I have seen many curious and uncanny things both in West Africa and in other parts of the world, I think the one I had in Bende District was the most uncanny and the most unaccountable.

Many will probably be incredulous when they read it, and I cannot blame them if they are. It might be put down to indigestion or funk or anything else. I can only say that I am relating exactly what I saw. I attempt no explanation—for to me the thing is unexplainable.

Having cleaned up the Kamalu ju-ju, I projected a longer journey than I had hitherto undertaken, as I wished to get into touch with as many of the tribes over which I had come to rule as possible. I accordingly made out my itinerary to include several towns in the north-east corner of the District, in the direction of the Cross River, although my boundary did not extend quite as far as that waterway.

I left my headquarters in the early morning and marched to a large village named Egugu, sixteen miles away, in which there was a native court. There I remained to await my carriers and my staff—which, as usual, consisted of the interpreter, a native police orderly, a lance-corporal and three native constables, two court messengers, and my three servants.

Nothing of any importance happened that night, and the people of the village were very friendly, while there were no cases of any importance to hear. So the next day I set out for another town called Isuingo, about seventeen miles farther on.

According to the notes made in the intelligence book by my predecessor, this place had none too good a reputation. The population was given as about eight hundred, and the three principal chiefs were stated to be "very unintelligent" and inclined to resent any interference with the affairs of their town. The roads were stated to be bad, water bad, and the rest house (built two years before during the occupation of the country by the troops) bad. The date given in the book showed that Isuingo had been visited by the political officer just twelve months before.

Judging that after so long a time the rest house—native built, of course—would need some repairing and cleaning up to make it at all habitable, I despatched one of the court messengers with instructions to the chiefs to have the place ready for me, also a supply of firewood and fresh water for my use. I did not anticipate that much in the way of repairs could be done in the time, and anticipated an uncomfortable stay because of the attitude of the people.

I left Egugu at half-past five in the morning and did the distance by eleven o'clock. Most of the route had lain through dense forest, but the last few miles of the road, if it could be called such, ran through many scattered compounds and was very heavy, being ankle-deep in loose sand. I was very hot, tired and, I may add, thirsty when at length I came to a large, sand-covered clearing on which a few odd oil-palms were growing. Then I saw what I judged to be the rest house, with barracks or quarters for my staff near by.

Coming away from this were two or three hundred natives of all ages and both sexes, who were armed with twig brooms, hoes and matchets. Evidently my instructions regarding the cleaning up of the place had been carried out. But I noticed that none of the people looked cheerful, as most gangs do when carrying out a collective task, and also that those who passed me did not flash their teeth and eyes in smiling greeting. In fact they looked sulky and decidedly unfriendly. Later the court messenger who had conveyed my instructions to the chiefs told me that they had been most reluctant to comply with them, and to turn out their people to do the work. Also, though he had told them to be at the rest house to meet me, they had not come.

Another thing I noticed was that the carriers, after having deposited their loads on the veranda of the rest house, did not linger to put them in order, but went as quickly as they could to the places arranged for them to live in. Even the police appeared to be uneasy, and almost surly in their silence. But I put this down as the effect of the long and trying march over the sand and under the sun.

After a bath and lunch I sent for the chiefs, who presently appeared looking as though they would rather have been anywhere else. I asked them through the interpreter why they had not been at the rest house to meet me; but it was some time before I got a reply. Eventually one grey-headed patriarch stepped forward, and after having scratched nearly every part of his none too clean skin with black-rimmed, claw-like nails—making a sound like rough concrete being rubbed with sandpaper—said:

"We do not mean to be disrespectful; but we did not want you to come here—it means trouble."

I questioned him, again through the interpreter; but was unable to elicit the nature of the trouble, so had to give it up.

That afternoon I visited the town and heard various complaints and palavers, returning to the rest house just before sunset to enter up my intelligence book and to note the various doings of the day in my diary. Then, after the evening meal—which was made unpleasant by the numerous flies—I prepared to turn in.

The rest house was of the usual bush-built type, having walls of red mud six feet in height, and a raffia palm-leaf roof. There were two rooms, separated by a wide, open passage. They were unceiled and the rafters of the roof met at the ridge-pole about fourteen feet above the floor, which was of smoothly beaten mud. Around the house ran mud and wattle walls about three feet six inches in height, with openings at intervals to give access to the veranda thus formed. The servants' quarters, kitchen hut and staff quarters were about thirty yards away to the left, leaving a sandy, open space in front of the rest house.

As the sun set and the evening chill set in I became aware of a peculiarly unpleasant odour. It was not in any particular place but seemed to pervade the whole house. It was a smell difficult to describe, though at the time I thought it was like long-dead bodies.

I called my servants and told them to find the source of this smell, with the idea of doing away with it. They were anything but keen, seeming to dislike the job, and after a very perfunctory search reported to me that they could find nothing. Their manner in making this report conveyed to me that they had not expected to find anything, and that the search was useless. Also they kept glancing at each other in a half-scared way, and seemed eager to be gone.

I was anything but pleased with my surroundings. The smell was bad enough; but in addition to this there was an unnatural something about the place that gave me an eerie feeling. I found myself peering into the gloomy corners, though what I expected to see I could not have described. However, I pulled myself together and prepared for sleep.

I had had my camp-bed set up on the veranda, with the object of escaping as much of the smell as possible, its head to the wall of the house; and beside it was a small folding camp-table, on which stood a lamp. My deck chair, office box and another folding table were about eight paces away, near enough for me to hear if anyone interfered with them.

After having tucked the mosquito curtain under the mattress for me, my servants said good-night, and scampered off with what I thought quite unnecessary haste. Then I started to read for a spell before turning down the lamp, but could not settle down to it.

There seemed to be what I might describe as "inaudible" sounds going on, which made me sit up at intervals and listen—for what I could not have said.

Then I heard a knock on the corner of the veranda post, and saw my cook—a boy who had been about two years in my service—standing outside with a hurricane lantern in his hand. He seemed to be shaking with fear, looking over his shoulder at intervals as if he expected something to jump at him any moment. With his teeth chattering so that he could hardly speak, he said: "Massa, I beg you, I beg you proper no sleep for dis place, he be bad place, make we go one time."

This needed some explanation. So I got up and asked him what he meant by saying it was a "bad place." But he could only repeat what he had said, and then added with a fearful glance over his shoulder: "Plenty man die here, plenty bad t'ing live here."

The first part of the statement I could well believe: the smell had become stronger and decidedly more "corpsey." I began to feel chilly, and also, I must admit, rather creepy. In fact, without admitting to myself that I was afraid, I would willingly have taken the boy's advice to sleep elsewhere had there been anywhere else to sleep. But I could hardly break camp at that time of night simply because I didn't like the place, or give as a reason that I was scared. My prestige would have fallen, and following that a lessening of my influence over the natives. So there was nothing to be done but stick it out and pray for sleep, or daylight.

I thought of calling a couple of my native police to mount guard. But this again would have shown at once that I feared something, and might have caused a stampede of the whole of my staff. Besides, whatever it was that was responsible for the stench and the creepy feeling, it was not anything that the police could deal with.

The boy still stood shivering, evidently in the grip of real terror. The least noise would, I think, have made him faint, or die, on the spot. I summoned up my courage and told him not to be a damned fool, as there was nothing to be afraid of; and warned him that if anyone came monkeying round they would get a bullet or two in them.

He begged me not to blame him if anything dreadful happened, and to remember that he had warned me. I then pretended to be angry and told him to clear out. But my heart sank as I saw him sprint across the sandy ground. Even he, scared though he was, had been welcome company, and as I heard him barricading himself in his hut I felt more lonely than ever, and wished heartily that he had not come, as he had communicated some of his panic to me.

I took up the lamp and made a tour round the house. Then I went through the two empty rooms. I saw nothing, but could not get away from the feeling that something was watching me. It seemed to be quite close to me when I was in the passage between the rooms, and farther off when I went to the end of the veranda where my gear was, and for this I was thankful.

Then, after inspecting my revolver to see that it was loaded and in good working order, I placed it under my pillow and got into bed again, tucked the mosquito curtain well in, and lay down. The lamp was burning well and a box of matches lay near it. I trusted that the oil in it would last out the night, for if it were to go out during the night I should be in a very unpleasant position.

It was then just ten o'clock, and all noises from the neighbouring town had ceased. A flicker or two from the fires the carriers had lighted showed now and again, but they soon died down and the darkness outside was intense. The lamp illuminated a space of only a few feet around me, so that I seemed to be at the centre of a tiny oasis of light in the midst of a desert of black nothingness. Not a sound came from the servants' quarters, nor from the police huts. Either all were asleep or were lying in scared silence, huddling together probably so as to feel the touch of something human. Almost I could have envied them.

I wished I had had a fire lighted in front. But it was too late now; for to have called any of my people would have showed that I shared their fear, and that was what I could not afford to do. So I just lay on my back, staring into the screen of darkness, hoping to fall asleep and yet afraid to lose consciousness. Sleep would not come, however, and I tried to imagine what it was that made the place uncanny. That this feeling was not the result of my own imagination was proved by the fact that my people felt it, and not only them but the townsfolk as well. It seemed to account for the unwillingness of the chiefs to have me stay there, and for the lack of cheerfulness shown by the gang which had done the cleaning up. They were, of course, superstitious like all natives and probably easily scared. But in my case it was different. Many and many a time in my career I had slept alone in the bush, and I was certainly not given to superstitious beliefs. Had I not experienced the curious eerie feeling I might have put down their fear to some local legend; but now I knew there must be something more than that to account for it.

The stillness was appalling. I could have yelled with the horror of it. Even the crickets had ceased their chirping; all the world might have been dead. Hours seemed to elapse.

Then I must have felt drowsy, but could not say if I had dropped off to sleep. All I knew was that suddenly I was wide awake. What was that? I sat up—my hair bristling—my skin cold and clammy.

There was a noise at the end of the veranda where my deck chair and other gear were! I pulled up the mosquito curtain, grasping my revolver, and sat on the edge of the bed, endeavouring to pierce that infernal gloom. Everything was as before, nothing had stirred. Then—as I looked—the chair was drawn back to the wall, so that the leg rest fell with a clatter to the hard mud floor.

What could have caused the chair to move? Nothing was visible, and yet the little group of travelling kit was well within the oasis of light.

Then the table was suddenly moved to one side as though some invisible hand had dragged it, and the chair toppled right over! If only I could have seen something I would have fired at once and found out afterwards what it was. But there was nothing to shoot at. Strangely enough, too, I felt less scared now that something was actually happening. I rose to my feet and started to investigate, carrying the lighted lamp. There was nothing to be seen near the overturned chair. A stray pie dog from the town or even a bush cat might have caused the upset. But then I should probably have heard the scampering of the retreating animal.

Then I thought that perhaps some of the unfriendly natives of the town might be trying to scare me into going away. I set my teeth and vowed that he, or they, should have a sorry time if I caught any of them. Or perhaps it was the village "craze" man. I waited—listening. But there was nothing.

Then I bethought me of an old trick I had seen practised. Stepping outside I gathered handfuls of fine dry sand and scattered it evenly and fairly thickly on the floor, around the place where the chair and table stood, and across the openings in the veranda wall, taking care to leave no marks on the surface. Any native, dog, cat, or any other animal walking over this would leave easily discernible tracks, and I would be able to find out what it was with which I had to contend.

Then I returned to my bed and sat down on it, to wait and watch, revolver at the ready.

For about ten minutes I sat there, though it seemed more like an hour, and no further movements occurred. I began to feel drowsy and longed to lie down to enjoy undisturbed sleep. In fact I was just on the point of doing so when the smell became more pronounced, seeming to drift across to me from the opening in the veranda wall at the foot of the bed. Stronger and stronger it grew until my stomach turned and I was nearly sick. At the same time the eerie feeling returned, together with what I might describe as a sense of some impending horror that sent cold shivers down my spine. My scalp felt as though it was being loosened, and my teeth chattered with cold. I sat there petrified, utterly unable to move hand or foot, in expectant terror.

How long this lasted I could not say; but presently I saw something move just outside the opening in the veranda wall, where the stench was coming from and where I had scattered the dry sand.

The first thing I saw was what I took to be the head of a very old native. Then the rest of the body appeared, crawling very slowly on hands and knees and not making a sound. Presently the creature came within the radius of the lamplight so that I could see it more clearly. A more horrible sight I have never seen, a more loathsome thing I hope never to see. The face was mottled with pock marks and the nose had been eaten away. The head was bald, the top of it being a dirty white, while the rest of the body was like old and mouldy leather, shrivelled and grey in patches. And the eyes—oh, those dreadful eyes. Never shall I forget them, as the head turned towards me. They were without life or expression, just two staring, dead eyes that did not move. The horrible, lipless mouth was half open, the jaw sagging like that of a dead person.

Slowly and silently it crawled across the sanded veranda. It was quite naked, and in one hand appeared to be holding a native-made rope, which it dragged after it as it moved.

It took not the slightest notice of me, nor of the lamp, nor of anything else; and presently it arrived within three paces of where I sat—frozen with horror and half stifled by the stench. I tried to call out, but my throat was paralyzed and my lips refused to move. Every feature of the horrible thing was now clearly visible, and they were those of a partly decomposed corpse.

To add to my horror the light of the lamp seemed to grow dimmer and I feared it would go out, leaving me in the darkness in close proximity to this loathsome object.

Then, dimly, I saw it slowly rise to its feet, until it stood upright, facing me. It could not have been more than four feet six inches in height, and now showed all its naked foulness. The figure was that of a very old, shrivelled-up, decaying native; and it held the short piece of rope in its hand. Slowly it lifted up its arms, gripped the wall plate of the veranda, and started to climb the upright post supporting the roof.

Just as its feet left the ground the power to move came back to me, and I felt alive again. I raised my revolver and shouted "Guzu!" (Ibo for stop, or halt). It took no notice. Again I called out "Guzu!" Still it took no notice.

Then I fired two shots in rapid succession at point-blank range, expecting to see the body fall. But nothing happened. The creature continued to climb, eventually reaching the rafters, trailing the rope behind, but making absolutely no sound.

I then stood up, reached out until the muzzle of the revolver was only three or four feet from the mark, and fired again. Still nothing happened, and the figure continued to climb.

I knew then that it could not be human. My shots had gone through it, and it was unharmed, not a drop of blood having fallen to the floor.

I fled, not by the opening through which the apparition had come, but through another one at the end of the veranda near my bed. Then I yelled for my boys, for the police, for anybody, at the same time firing my revolver twice into the air to rouse them.

This caused considerable commotion in the lines, and there was much shouting and waving of lighted sticks as hurricane lamps were hastily ignited. But even then none of the members of my retinue were in any hurry to come in my direction.

However, they came at last—in a body—after much cursing and threatening on my part. They carried lamps and torches, and looked so scared that the least thing would have made them fly, panic-stricken, for their lives.

I ordered the lance-corporal of police to have the house surrounded, but not to enter it, telling him that a thief had climbed the roof and was still there. I instructed him also that anyone attempting to escape was to be arrested at once. Then, accompanied by two of my servants carrying lamps and matchets, I entered the house from the back, as I did not wish to disturb my "sand-traps."

We searched the house without finding anything, and I noticed that the putrid smell was no longer perceptible. Then I carefully examined the places over which I had spread the sand. There was not a track!—not a mark of any kind!

There were two holes in the veranda post, made by the two bullets from my revolver, one above another. And from their position the bullets must have passed right through the body of the "thing" as it climbed the post.

There was also a bullet mark on the rafter along which it was crawling when I fired the third shot. It also showed that the bullet must have reached its mark.

It was gratifying to know that I had hit what I had aimed at—though even a poor shot with a revolver would have found it difficult to miss an object of that size at so short a range, and I was by no means a poor shot. But this proof made the whole thing more mysterious than ever. What was it I had seen? A ghost? The idea seemed absurd, because whatever it was, it had appeared to be solid enough. And the smell? I had never heard of a ghost that stank as this one had done.

There was but little sleep for any of the party during the remainder of the night. I sat in my deck chair and listened to the, for the nonce, welcome sound of my people's voices as they discussed the occurrence. The voices were human, and therefore a comfort after what I had gone through, so I did not order silence as I would ordinarily have done.

When daylight came I had another thorough search made, again with negative results. Not a trace of anything was found, and the air was perfectly sweet and fresh once more.

I determined to find out what I could about the history of the place. But I knew it would be of no use sending for the chiefs; they would, like all primitive peoples, tell as little as possible to a white man. So I sent the interpreter to the town with orders to find, if he could, an intelligent native.

After a while he returned with a bright-looking youth, dressed in khaki shorts and shirt, who informed me in moderately good English that his name was Benjamin Oku, and that he was a native of Isuingu, but had been educated at the Calabar mission, and was a clerk employed by one of the trading firms at Calabar. At present, he said, he was on leave, and was visiting his people, whom he had not seen since he was very young.

I did not tell him what I had seen the night before, but simply promised him a dash (*i.e.* a present or tip) if he could tell me the history of the rest house. Nothing loth, he agreed; and this is his story.

Long before the white men came to the place the ground on which the rest house had been built was the ju-ju sacrificial grove. It was then bush, in the midst of which had stood a large cotton tree.

Hundreds of people had been sacrificed there, the ju-ju being a very bad one, and its chief priest a very, *very* bad man.

At this point of the story Benjamin was at great pains to inform me that, of course, he had never had anything to do with the sacrifices, indeed he had never even seen one, as he had been much too young to participate in such affairs when he was taken away by the missionaries. I let that pass and told him to proceed.

This ju-ju priest, he continued, was greatly feared by the people of this and other towns for many miles around, as he was not at all particular as to the place from which he drew his victims, consequently none knew the day when they might find themselves "smelled out" for sacrifice.

About two years before my visit troops had "halted" for some weeks at Isuingu, and the white man in command had ordered the people to build a rest house, choosing as the site the ju-ju ground. And although the chiefs and various others of the people had suggested other and better sites, he had been adamant—doubtless thinking this the best way to stamp out entirely the superstitious and savage customs the place stood for.

The old ju-ju priest had evidently become crazy when he saw what was happening to his preserves, and lodged a violent protest. But the white man's reply to this had been to make him assist at the demolition of the grove. The same evening he had cast spells—cursing the place, and swearing that no white man should ever rest in peace in the house that was to be built on what, to him, was sacred ground. The chiefs and people had been terrified at these curses, but in spite of this they were obliged to build the house, and on the day it was finished the troops departed.

On the day after that the old priest was seen wandering round the house, repeating his spells and wailing loudly. The following morning his dead body was seen hanging from the main ridge-pole of the house, in the passage between the two rooms. He had evidently climbed up from the inside of the roof, an extraordinary feat for such an old man, and hanged himself with a piece of native rope.

The people had been too frightened to cut the body down; so it had hung there until it rotted. Then it had fallen piece-meal to the ground and been "cleaned up" by the scavenger pigs of the town, so that nothing remained.

After this no one would go near the rest house, and many people journeying home from their farms after dark had seen the old man, just as I had, dragging the rope on his way to do what had ended his life.

I asked Benjamin if he had ever seen the old priest. He replied that, as a child, he had often seen him; and described him as being very small, very old, his skin shrivelled, and his face so badly pitted that his nose had been eaten away. Also his bald head was white in patches owing, as rumour stated, to his having fallen into the fire when young.

This description tallied in every way with that of the apparition I had seen during the night; there could be no doubt about that. And it made me think a bit, I can tell you.

At Benjamin's request I promised I would not let the chiefs or any of the townspeople know that he had told me this history. But I was determined that no other white man should go through what I had; so I called the chiefs and told them that the house was dirty and stank; that I was going to burn it, and that they would have to build another on a site which I would select.

I watched the effect of my words as they were rendered into the vernacular by the interpreter. All of the chiefs showed approval, and all agreed with alacrity to do what I told them; asking me to choose the site at once, and making no objection when I chose the best one in the place.

Before leaving I fired the house of evil, and watched it burn until only a few charred uprights remained.

In course of time the new rest house was completed, and I have since slept peacefully in it on many occasions. The site of the old one is overgrown with bush—derelict, for no native will go near it, although there are "farms" all round it, so much does its reputation cling as a bad, *bad* place.

What was it I saw that night? An elemental? The earth-bound spirit of the old priest paying for the crimes he had committed during his life? And how to account for the horrible and indescribable stench that pervaded the house when the apparition was "appearing"? I cannot.

VI

The Imo River Ju-jus. Nkuku

THE Imo River is not a big one as rivers go in West Africa. But it is an important one because it runs through country containing enormous numbers of oil-palms; and being navigable by large trading canoes for many miles, it forms the main means of outlet for the palm-oil and kernels produced in the interior.

This river formed the boundary of my District of Bende in the west; consequently the towns and villages on its left bank came under my jurisdiction, in many instances, of course, only nominally at first. It was here that I was a good deal worried by those breeders of trouble—the Aros.

These people had had for many years the monopoly of trade on the river. They would come up from one of the coast ports with two or three large canoes loaded with trade goods, cash, empty bags and a few puncheons. A site would be selected on one of the banks as a landing-place, and from there they would go inland with portions of their stock-in-trade. But the waterside remained their headquarters, and there they inhabited huts they had compelled the local inhabitants to build for them. They would " sit down " here until they had filled their empty bags with palm-kernels and their puncheons with palm-oil. Some of their number would then take these to the factories on the coast, dispose of them and purchase more trade goods.

Large profits were made in this way, since they could give what they chose for the produce they bought—having no competitors to which the unfortunate producer could offer his stuff. But they were not satisfied with this more or less legitimate trade. Still larger profits were to be made from the traffic in human flesh and blood; so they bought or stole young boys and girls, who were disposed of for various purposes; the principal one being, I strongly suspected, that of serving to swell the retinue of some dead chief on the other side of the grave.

This went on for many years after all such traffic was supposed to have been stopped, and it was a matter extremely difficult to deal with; because, naturally, those who bought and sold took care to keep their mouths shut.

In addition to all this, and used in conjunction with all their activities, were the ju-jus. In fact the whole river was a ju-ju, and the Aros were its priests—or obeah men. These priests were believed by the Ibo inhabitants to possess the power of turning themselves into various animals or reptiles at will; crocodiles, iguanas and boa-constrictors being the usual ones chosen. And it was for this reason that these reptiles were held to be sacred; anyone killing or injuring one being punished by some unpleasant form of death.

Crocodiles were also supposed to be liable to be tenanted by the souls of departed chiefs, and this was

TWO ASSISTANT JU-JU PRIESTS

HEAD JU-JU PRIEST

an additional reason why they were never killed. Many were fed regularly on human flesh, and were then doubly sacred.

The Ibo people, who lived on the banks of the river and who subsisted largely on the fish they caught in its waters, were obliged to take an oath of fidelity to the river ju-ju; and for the administration of this the priests charged a fee which varied in amount according to the means of the person being sworn.

The method of taking the oath was rather interesting, if simple. Certain flat stones, weighing about twenty-five pounds, were kept at particular spots on the river, just immersed. One of them was taken out by a priest and placed on the head of the initiate, who had to balance it there without touching it with his hands. A leaf from a ju-ju tree was twisted so as to form a funnel and placed in his mouth, the outer part of it being directly under the edge of the stone. Water from the river was then poured over the stone, some of it trickling into the mouth of the funnel. The initiate swallowed this, and then had to swear always to uphold the prestige of the ju-ju, never to divulge any of its secrets, to refrain from injuring any of the sacred denizens of the river and to give them due warning at the approach of danger. The penalty for breaking this oath was death, and probably an unpleasant one.

Should the stone fall from the head during the ceremony it was a sign that the ju-ju had rejected the candidate. He was then sold as a slave, being considered too vile a person to be left to dwell in the country. This, however, seldom happened "accidentally," as all natives are adepts at balancing and carrying heavy loads on their heads. When it did occur it was intentional, one or more of the priests having a grudge against the man or some member of his family.

But the clause in the oath that made the most trouble was one that bound every initiate to assist in keeping the waterway inviolable. That is, open for the trade of the Aros and closed for all others, especially Government officials. No orders given by the Government were to be obeyed, and any messengers sent by Government, such as police or court messengers, were to be beaten and driven out. Also any summonses issued by the native courts were to be ignored.

You can quite imagine that it was impossible to administer a country under such conditions. And it was equally impossible that the unfortunate inhabitants could be blamed. The fault lay with the Aro trader-priests, and it was with these that I knew I would have to deal.

I learned that the headquarters of the powerful ju-ju was at the source of the river, a few miles north of what is now the district headquarters-station of Okigwe, but which was then one of the eight chief settlements of the Aros. But this was beyond my boundary, and I could do nothing against it—even if I could have reached it without several companies of soldiers. I believe it was eventually destroyed by a patrol sent up for the purpose, but that was after my time.

There were, however, other important branches which functioned locally, and which concerned me more than the one many miles away. These were situated in the midst of a very hostile and truculent-seeming people, and were consequently difficult to locate and still more difficult to destroy. Certainly nothing could be done without an adequate force—for to have penetrated into such a country with only a few police would have been an act of madness, and asking for trouble with the certainty of getting it. Several patrols had already been partially through; one being consequent on the particularly brutal murder of a medical officer who had missed his way and cycled into a hostile village.

After having had a lot of difficulty, and finding it quite useless to deal with these people without a show of force, I eventually convinced the powers that were that another patrol was overdue. A couple of sections of the West African Frontier Force were sent, and to this little show I attached myself as political officer in charge.

In this position I was able to direct operations, and my first objective was to endeavour to find and destroy a particularly bad branch ju-ju which was called "Nkuku." But for some time I was unable to discover its whereabouts. Eventually, however, I got an inkling of its site by overhearing scraps of conversation, but the information so obtained was hardly sufficient to act upon.

For some time I had been picking up from odd sources little bits of intelligence regarding this ju-ju. I gathered it was a very powerful one, judging from the awe-stricken tones that accompanied any tale told about it, though what its special diversions were I could not gather, as most of my informants were nonnatives and spoke only from hearsay. There were numerous complaints being made that children were mysteriously disappearing, always in pairs; and I noticed that these disappearances usually occurred during or just before full moon. The friendly chiefs assured me that ordinary slave-dealing was not responsible for this—and they were in a position to know—but they could not, or would not, give me any further information.

On top of this, and the crowning offence which made me more than ever determined to locate the ju-ju, was the disappearance of a uniformed court messenger who had been sent by the native court to serve a summons in a neighbouring town. No trace of the man was ever found, and I began to think that some day I also might disappear in an equally mysterious manner. Doubtless this would have opened the eyes of certain people to the seriousness of affairs, but it would have been distinctly unpleasant from my point of view.

However, to return to the patrol. As I have said, I was its political adviser, which meant that it had to go where I wanted it. There were three other Europeans, the officer commanding, a medical officer, and a non-commissioned officer. My intentions were that there was to be no fighting unless we were definitely and seriously attacked; for, as I have said, the people could not be blamed for acting on information given to them by the Aros, whom they feared to disobey.

We had a maxim gun and its team, and carriers were allowed for a maximum duration of operations of from three weeks to a month.

We started from Bende headquarters-station, and after leaving the " friendly " country, a march of eight miles was made up the left bank of the Imo, along narrow, winding paths through dense bush; though there were occasional clearings where yams or maize were being grown. Several small villages were passed, all recently abandoned—evidently on the news of our approach; but no opposition to our advance was attempted.

The first night we camped on an old farm clearing, and the next day the march was resumed through the same sort of country. But we had gone only some four miles when we were fired on by unseen foes in the bush. Fortunately no one was hit, though slugs and potlegs were flying all around and over us.

We did not return the fire, and went on for another mile until, just before reaching a large village, we were again fired on and several armed natives were seen retreating before us through the village. Still I would not have the fire returned.

When we entered the village we found it deserted like the others, so we went on through it, and about half a mile beyond found a suitable place for an encampment; there being sufficient " open country " to protect us from the possibility of a fusillade from the bush, as all the " cover " was well out of range.

Here I proposed to " sit down " for a day or two and endeavour to find out the cause of the hostile demonstrations. That they were inspired by the Aros and had some connection with their ju-ju I very strongly suspected. But whatever the reason for them there were no more, possibly because we were too far off to be reached in safety. But there was the difficulty that arises in most such cases, the problem of getting into touch with the people and letting them know that we intended them no harm. We were in this matter up against the Aros, of course. These astute people would most certainly have told their dupes that the white man had come to enslave and destroy them, and that they must resist our advance.

We could easily have obtained Aro guides, but I had had enough experience with these gentry to know that they would have been delighted to have the opportunity of leading us astray, as they were past masters of the art of "soft-mouth palaver," and had on more occasions than one completely taken in officers commanding patrols.

We remained inactive that day and all the next, waiting for someone to appear. But nothing happened and not a soul showed up. I recognized that some sort of action was necessary, as food was running short for the carriers; but what? Then I had a brainwave. I knew that one of the interpreters was an expert in the art of "drum talking," so I asked him if he thought he could talk to the people and explain to them that we would not hurt them. He said he was "fit for try," so the O.C. and myself with a few men proceeded to the market-place of the deserted village, which was some four or five hundred yards from our camp. It was a big clearing with paths leading away from it in various directions into the bush, and in the middle, beneath some shady trees, was the town drum—used ordinarily for calling meetings, giving alarms and

TYPICAL JU-JU DRUM

for sending messages to other villages within earshot; in fact a sort of local telegraph office.

The drum was made of a large log of hardwood about twelve feet in length and four in diameter. The interior was hollowed out, leaving a shell about two inches in thickness; the ends being left solid, and an open slot some two inches wide ran the whole length of it. Sufficient wood was left at both ends to allow of grotesque human heads, like the gargoyles on a cathedral, being carved; while on the sides were the figures of a man, a woman, a dog and a crocodile done in low relief—these being the totems of the Ibo peoples.

When this drum was beaten with short sticks of varying thicknesses it gave forth not unmusical notes which differed in pitch according to the stick used, or the strength of the blows. Most natives can do a little "talking" in this manner, but, as in all trades, there were recognized experts, and my interpreter was one of these.

I told him to get busy with his sticks and to send the following message: "Come to the market without fear, the white man is here and wants to talk with you. There is no war palaver; come."

He soon had the message rapped out in the code used in the district, and kept repeating it at intervals. The sound would, I imagine, be heard clearly several miles away, though not so far as it would had it been the middle of a still night instead of daytime.

The O.C. had never heard of this method of communication and was very sceptical about results. He was anxious to push on, being worried about the carriers' food. But I insisted on giving my experiment a fair trial. Meanwhile we sat on logs and waited, while the few men we had with us lay on the ground in full view from the paths leading into the place.

For an hour I kept the interpreter at it, until he was pretty well tired; and I had almost decided that the business was going to be a failure when two figures appeared at one of the debouchures, both carrying guns. For some time they watched us, taking no notice of our signals for them to approach, nor of the seductive messages yelled out to them by the interpreter.

By and by more appeared from other paths, all of them being armed; and the O.C. did not like the situation at all. Neither did I; nor, from the looks of him, the interpreter either.

Then one by one the figures disappeared, only to reappear soon afterwards unarmed, evidently having given their guns to others to hold. I went towards them with the interpreter, and we met half-way. Then I proceeded to tell them that we had not come to make war, but to go peacefully through their villages, and to hear complaints if they had any to make.

One of them asked if I was Abaja-Aka; and upon the interpreter answering that I was, they seemed to be more confident, evidently seeing that I was not the "terror" they had been led to believe me to be. They knew now that I would not "bite" if not attacked. I then distributed heads of tobacco to show my friendly intentions, and they promised to bring in as many of their chiefs and people as they could the following morning; also to bring in yams, maize, fowls and other food-stuffs, for which I promised them payment.

Early the next morning a whole crowd arrived, all young men and boys, together with two or three older men whom they said were chiefs. But I knew better, though they were certainly a villainous and treacherous-looking lot.

After a pow-wow with these, confidence was established and trade in food-stuffs became quite brisk, enough being forthcoming to provide for all our needs. But I knew it would be quite hopeless to interrogate any of them regarding the whereabouts of the ju-ju I was seeking. None of them would dare to answer in public, and few indeed in private, questions the very asking of which was sacrilege. I should only have had to listen to a lot of lies, and have succeeded very well in warning the obeah men of my intentions. I therefore instructed the interpreter to make a few judicious inquiries on the strict understanding that all information would be treated in confidence, and also authorized him to promise a dash (*i.e.* a present) sufficient in value to purchase a wife—about five pounds' worth of goods was ample in those days for that purpose.

This method was successful, for the same evening the interpreter reported that he had found just the lad I wanted—much to my satisfaction. But on no account would the man go to the actual ju-ju place, though willing to show the road leading to it. Also he wanted my assurance that it would never be known that he had given the show away.

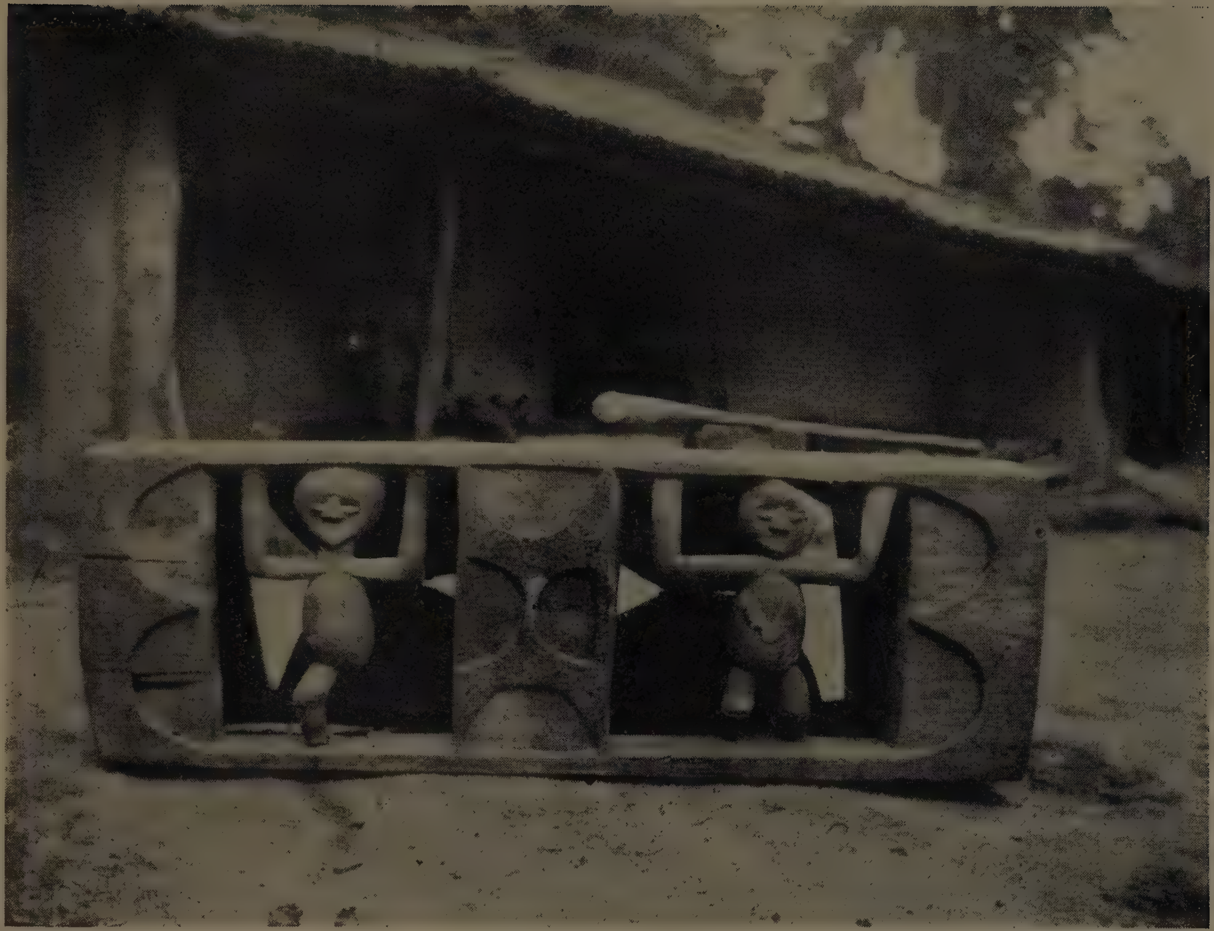
This last I could manage quite easily, for I had thought it out. The interpreter went away again with instructions to the man to apply in the morning for a job as a temporary carrier. He would then be given a light load and a walking-stick to carry. We would go for a short trek round about, giving out that we were visiting other villages, and I would see that we went along the path out of which the ju-ju road opened. While marching he would be a few yards in front of me, and when we were passing the ju-ju road he was to drop his stick, pick it up again and go on as before. We could then go on as far as the next village and from there return to camp, where he would be paid off as a carrier, and return for his " dash " when I had proved his indication to be correct.

All this he agreed to, and the next day all was done according to plan. Our friend arrived with his stick, was taken on as a carrier, received my camp chair to carry, and off we went in the direction given by our guide to the interpreter.

We were not a numerous party, only the O.C., the M.O. and myself with a couple of dozen soldiers. Quite a sufficient escort for our purpose that day. We took half a dozen carriers as a blind to justify the presence of our guide, together with our personal servants, who attended to the commissariat arrangements.

The O.C. was a little doubtful about our informer. He was afraid we might be led into an ambush, and took all necessary precautions. But I was pretty confident that the information to be given would be genuine, and that we were really on the track of the ju-ju.

After we had gone about two miles along a bush path that looked fairly well frequented, leading along



JU-JU DRUM

the river bank in an up-stream direction, and through two small villages to which most of the people had returned, my friend dropped his stick in a most natural manner, picked it up and went on as though nothing had happened.

When I saw him do this, nothing was visible, from where I was walking, in the almost impenetrable screen of bush at the side, but on coming up to the place I saw a small path leading off at right angles. It was so insignificant that it might easily have been taken for a mere gap in the line of green. I marked the spot as being almost opposite to a huge cotton tree, which could not very well be mistaken, for there was not another one of such a size anywhere near.

We went on for another mile, then halted for an hour in the market-place of a village, a very small one and quite deserted. Then we returned to camp by another route, well satisfied with our morning's work. The guide was paid the usual carrier's wage for the day and went off to his village, his work done for the present.

The next morning we set out again, this time in force. Only the Officer Commanding, myself and the interpreter knew the object of the march. The men, however, had been warned that there was a possibility of a scrap.

The O.C. and I led the way with the usual three men as "point," and we reached the big cotton tree without incident. Here I told the O.C. that we turned off, and he gave the order to right wheel to "point." But before proceeding down this path the men "blocked" the main path as an indication to the main body of the direction we had taken. The new track was very narrow and led us through dense bush, so that we could only go very slowly and in single file. I think then that the pointsmen had guessed our object, for they became very much on the alert, peering ahead and trying to see through the bush on each side, with their rifles at the ready.

After about half a mile of difficult going I saw the "point" suddenly assume a crouching attitude, throw up their rifles as though to shoot, and then run forward. We did the same and came out into a small clearing. Around this there were several small, lean-to shelters, roofed with mats, and under them were mud-built altars; while scattered around them was the oddest collection of rubbish imaginable. Pieces of what had been gaily coloured cloth hung in strips from the roofs, eggs impaled on upright sticks, young chickens dangling by one leg—still alive and squeaking—and some skulls of bullocks tied round the trunk of a small tree.

On the altars was more rubbish. A number of small earthen pots filled with vile concoctions of some sort which stank abominably, rolls of grey clay that looked like sausages, lots of feathers, and crowning each altar was a human skull, minus the lower jaw. Blood—I could not say if it were human—had recently been poured and sprinkled over each altar, but had caked and dried.

In the middle of the clearing, and planted in a circle about four feet apart, were thirteen young ju-ju trees, the stems of which were decorated with the skulls of goats and dogs, pieces of old cloth, and very much decayed remnants of food. At the foot of each tree was a flat, water-worn stone, evidently from the Imo river. These stones were about eighteen inches in diameter and nine inches thick, except the one under the centre tree, which was as big again as the others, and the tree more gaily decorated.

This was evidently the head priest's throne, the others being for his subordinates; and the arrangement of the whole indicated that it was a meeting-place of the priests who served the Nkuku ju-ju; and it was here probably that the fates of the various victims were decided.

I now knew that we were on the right track, and that the ju-ju could not be far away; so before dealing with this "House of Parliament" I decided to find it. The fact that the chickens were still alive and that the blood on the altars was comparatively fresh indicated that our visit had been totally unexpected, and also that the members of the ju-ju could not be far away. I fully expected to get a hot reception farther on, and arranged with the O.C. to "clear the bush" at intervals by firing volleys into it.

Then we searched for a track that would lead to the ju-ju, but could not find one at first. Indeed there appeared to be no other outlet from the clearing except the one by which we had entered. Then, hearing a trickle of water, one of the soldiers pushed aside the bushes and discovered a small stream flowing towards the place, though invisible through the screen of vegetation. It was about three feet wide and a couple of inches of water ran over a stony bed. I decided that this must be the way, so we followed its windings for some two hundred yards. Then I saw ahead of us a bluff covered with scrub, and leading up to this a track that had recently been used, for the edge of the stream was still damp where water had dripped from feet leaving this wet road.

We followed the track, and as we left the water I heard the splashing of the rest of our party as they came after us up the stream. Before us the ground rose steeply, and presently we came to a thick semicircular wall, built of large stones piled loosely on top of each other. It was about six feet high and four in thickness. The two ends of the semicircle butted against the almost perpendicular sand-stone cliff; and through some openings about half-way from the top flowed the water which formed the stream up which we had come.

As we approached the wall we noticed a horrible stench, one that had by now become very familiar to me. I could not help smiling at the other Europeans, who held their noses and endeavoured to hold their breaths also. I felt nearly sick with it as we got nearer, but took care not to show my feelings.

At first the O.C., and I too, thought we had come across a real stone fort. But if it was a fort it was undefended so far as we could see; at any rate there was no sign of any garrison as we surrounded it as far as the base of the cliff. The structure was evidently of great age, as it was covered with long moss, ferns and other vegetation growing in the interstices of the stones. Large trees growing on the top of the cliff completely shielded it from the rays of the sun, so that the whole place was dark, damp and stinking.

As soon as the men had been posted we searched for an entrance to the place, but could find none. Then we saw at one side a set of roughly placed stones that formed a sort of flight of steps which led about half-way up the wall. Up these some of the soldiers climbed and peered timorously over the top; then uttered exclamations of astonishment and scrambled down again, jabbering to each other excitedly. I called out and asked them what they had seen, but the only answer I got was "No good, bad t'ing live." There was nothing for it but to see for myself; so, closely followed by the O.C., I climbed the rough steps, both of us holding our noses the while.

What I saw was a semicircular pool of water whose surface was about two feet below the top of the wall, and ended in a stony beach under the cliff at the back which led up to what appeared to be the entrance to a cave.

But what had startled the soldiers was the thing in the middle of the pool. Lying perfectly still, with its glassy eyes staring at us in horrible anticipation, was a huge crocodile, half in and half out of the water. As it saw us the monster slowly crawled or swam in our direction and, although aware that it could not reach us, such was the effect of this slow advance that we scrambled down the steps again with more alacrity than dignity, seeing in imagination its head appearing over the wall where we had been a second or two before.

How many more of these horrors were in the tank we could not say, and the soldiers were all for firing a volley into the water. But I wanted that job, so I borrowed a loaded rifle and went up the steps again until my head and shoulders were above the wall.

There was the reptile only a few feet away, regarding me with its baleful eyes. As it saw me it opened its cavernous mouth as though expecting some tasty morsel to be thrown into it. I slowly raised the rifle and aimed for that mouth, pulled the trigger and dropped back to the ground.

There arose a fearful din and splashing. I looked again and saw the brute in its death throes, lashing the water and the stony beach at the far side with its tail.

Gradually its struggles grew feebler and at length ceased. Then all hands clambered up the wall wherever they could find a foothold, and saw the crocodile as dead as a crocodile can be. My aim had been true, for the bullet had gone in by the mouth and out by the back of the head, clean through the brain, the greater portion of which had been blown through the big hole made by the bullet as it came out.

There were no signs of any more crocodiles. But still there might be another one or two skulking at the bottom or hiding in the cave. At any rate no one was at all eager to test the matter by " going over the top." So we determined to empty the whole affair.

This was not a very simple job, but we managed at length to loosen and pull out several of the large stones at the bottom, using as levers large straight branches which we cut in the bush. A good deal of hard work was involved at first, because the stones were well jammed in position. But afterwards the rest came away without much trouble. Then the pent-up water gushed out—and how it stank! We retreated to a respectable distance until the rush was over and then, when it had subsided to a small stream, looked over the wall again.

The floor of the tank was now exposed, and consisted of I do not know how many inches of stinking mud. Over this, and forming a channel, flowed the small stream from the mouth of the cave; and as it washed away the mud in its passage it exposed to view what were obviously human remains. I knew now what had become of children who disappeared, and also what the fate of my court messenger had been.

We now started all hands to demolish the wall, and stone after stone was rolled down the bank into the stream at the bottom. Then we tackled the dead crocodile, roping him with tie-tie cut in the bush, first placing six men with loaded rifles to cover the entrance to the cave. All the rest tailed on to the tie-tie ropes, and gradually the dead reptile was dragged clear of the foul mud in which it had sunk. Then we measured it and found it to be nearly fourteen feet long. It was of great age, and had probably lived in the tank all its life; being well supplied with human flesh it would have no desire to escape, even if it could have managed to do so.

There remained the cave to be investigated. But very naturally no one was willing to enter; so the six men who had covered it were ordered to fire a volley into it. The response to this was a muffled roar, followed by a rushing sound as of the flapping of many wings.

This scared the soldiers and carriers. "He be dem ju-ju he talk," they muttered, and I thought they would all take to their heels. But seeing their officer and myself standing firm they also remained, and gradually the noise subsided.

Another volley was fired. Whatever was inside evidently could not be killed by bullets, for the result was the same. " Make we go," begged some of the men. " Ju-ju bad too much."

I certainly could not account for the extraordinary noise. Nor could anyone else. But I determined to try another way. I told the carriers to collect dry branches, and these I had tied in bundles which were set on fire and pushed into the entrance by means of the long sticks we had cut for bringing down the wall. Then dry grass was thrown on top, and that gave out volumes of smoke.

This did the trick. The secret of the cave was revealed. The noise of flapping wings started again, and from out of the dense clouds of smoke came hundreds of large bats. They were blinded by daylight and half stupefied by smoke, so they flew wildly anywhere, into our faces, down into the mud, and some fastened on to the soldiers' tunics with their wing-claws.

There was much merriment among the men at this anti-climax. All fear had gone, and volunteers were immediately forthcoming to enter the cave. I went in afterwards, but beyond a spring of fresh water bubbling through the rock at the far end there was nothing to be seen but a few mouldy human bones.

There was no more to be done here. So we re-adjusted the tie-tie ropes round the dead crocodile and hauled him down to the stream, then along to the " priests' parlour." The brute's tail still had some life in it, as one man who went too near it found to his cost when a spasmodic movement knocked him on his back in the stream, much to the amusement of his comrades.

When we reached the clearing the work of destruction started. We pulled down the sheds and piled the dry mat roofs over the crocodile in the middle of the "magic circle," and then put a light to the lot. There were some protests from one or two of the men at this, as they said they wanted to eat the reptile and were reluctant to see good "beef" wasted. But I overruled that. The idea was too disgusting; for the brute had lived all its life on human flesh, and to have eaten its flesh would almost have savoured of cannibalism.

We waited until the fire had nearly burned out and then returned to camp. I was very well satisfied with what had been done. We had made an end of the Nkuku ju-ju.

I found out afterwards that this "sacred" crocodile was regularly fed on human flesh, and got nothing else—except it occasionally ate a bat. Pairs of victims had to be supplied monthly by various towns, hence the children stolen for the purpose.

It was the elder of the pair as a rule who was bound and thrown over the wall; the younger being taken away to some bush market and there sold as a slave, eventually being slaughtered at the obsequies of some old chief.

There had originally been two crocodiles in the tank, both supposed to contain the souls of long-departed chiefs. One of them was stated to have changed its form, and the soul that had been in it entering the body of one of the chief's relations, an astute person who was now a "big man" in another country. It could not have died there, or we should have seen its remains in the mud. Probably it had in some way escaped from its prison and managed to reach the river.

Before we broke camp the informer was given his dowry money, with which he was very well pleased, and doubtless purchased a wife to his fancy. I could get nothing out of him regarding the actual workings of the ju-ju, as he swore he had never been to the place and had only heard about it. So I was never able to get sufficient evidence against any of the Nkuku ju-ju priests, nor even to formulate any definite charges on which to make any arrests. But as this part of the country was opened up permanently shortly afterwards by a big patrol, I do not think the ju-ju was ever started again.

I was sorry afterwards that I had not had the old crocodile flayed and taken the skin as a trophy. But at the time, such was our eagerness to destroy the whole sink of iniquity that none of us thought about it. However, I metaphorically cut another notch in the handle of my tomahawk to mark one more defunct ju-ju.

VII

THE IMO RIVER JU-JUS. AFOR-ALUM

TO continue the tale of the Imo River ju-jus. Several smaller ones were found when the Bende-Onitsha Hinterland Expedition was operating in these parts. They were all more or less run on similar lines to that of Kamalu; except perhaps that they were not quite so elaborate. I am sorry to say that the creatures responsible for the running of them got clear away, and thus escaped the punishment they deserved.

But there was one which was run for quite different ends, or rather I might say that the end—which was gain—was attained by totally different means. The founder of this ju-ju, which was known by the name of Afor-alum, was a half-breed Aro—his mother being an Ibo woman from Bonny. He was an unprincipled scoundrel, but undoubtedly a clever organizer, as will be appreciated when I have told about his effort.

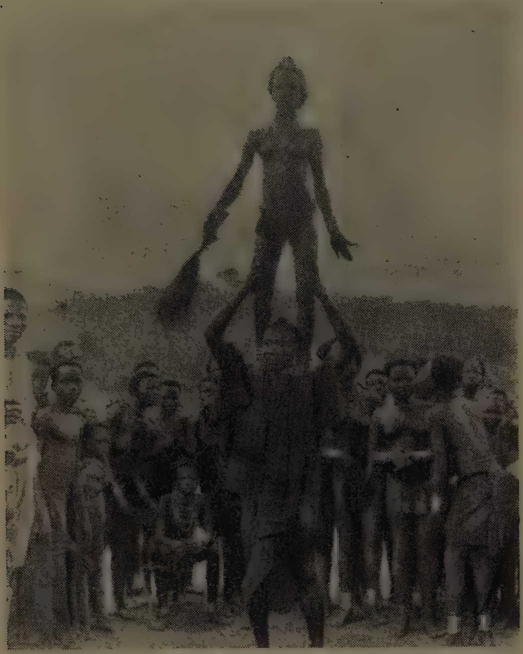
After the big patrol had finished its main work, several smaller ones were sent to outlying places to clean up any remaining abuses and break up any further attempts by the Aros to reorganize their ju-jus. To one of these I was attached, or rather it was "attached" for my purposes; for the political officer controls the activities of a patrol, other than strictly military operations.

It was during this time that I got an inkling of something which seemed to need my attention, and it was—as has often happened with me—pure chance that I was able to follow up what I suspected at the time to be an ordinary ju-ju like the others.

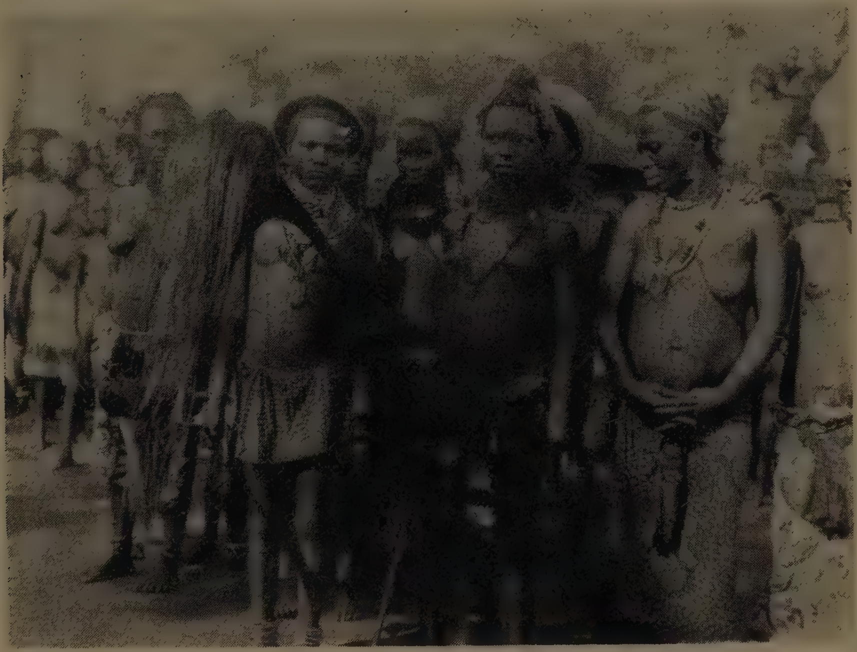
One morning when sitting in camp under my palm-leaf shelter hearing complaints and settling disputes, a well-developed young woman of about fourteen years of age came out of the crowd of complainants and spectators that surrounded me. When her turn came she said she wished to be protected from a young man who was living in a neighbouring village and who wanted to marry her by force when she refused him. She had escaped and fled, hearing that Abaja-Aka was in this place, and knowing he would help her.

I asked her the usual questions as to her name, place of birth and subsequent history, the two first of which she answered in a straightforward manner. But she hesitated over the last one, after stating that she had been stolen a year ago from her native village near my headquarters at Bende—one that I had often visited and knew well—by an Aro whose name she did not know.

This was as far as I could get her to go. Any further questions only had the effect of making her fix her eyes on the ground and maintain an obstinate silence. That there was something at the back of this I was convinced, so I reserved her complaint until I had got through with the others. Meantime I told the older of the two interpreters to find out quietly, if he could, why it was she refused to go on with her tale.



PROFESSIONAL DANCING GIRL OF
DAMA TRIBE, OBUDU



PROFESSIONAL DANCING GIRLS AND THEIR DUENNAS
(DAMA TRIBE, OBUDU)

Later in the afternoon this interpreter came to me and reported that the girl wanted to tell me all, but did not wish to do this in the hearing of all and sundry. She begged I would hear her case in private. To this I agreed, bringing in only the officer commanding the patrol, and the story she unfolded was, as I think you will agree when you hear it, rather astonishing.

The Aro man who had trapped and carried her off took her to his town, and kept her there under strict guard. At this time she stated she was not married and did not " savvy man " (an expression that signified she was a virgin).

She had been sent by her uncle, with whom she was living—her parents being dead—to the waterside to get a pot of water. This waterside was a good distance from the village, and by the time she was ready to return with the full calabash on her head it was getting dark. She was not afraid, as there were no " bad " people about. But just as she had started on her homeward way a man jumped out of the bush behind and threw a cloth over her head, tied her hands and feet, then picked her up and ran some distance into the bush. There he left her until it was quite dark.

He then returned with two other men, and together they carried her many miles during the night. Toward morning she was put into a canoe and taken across water—presumably the Imo River—and then deposited in a small room in a house that was surrounded by a " compound." The cloth was then taken from her head, her hands freed, but her feet shackled to a post in the ground. A little food and water were given to her, and she was left for a day and a night.

The next morning her abductor came to her with a woman, and she was taken down to the river to wash, after which she was given a white calico cloth to wrap round herself. She was then taken through another house—a big one—into a compound, and from that into a smaller one that had high mud walls all round it, and only one entrance—the one she had come in by.

In this compound were various ju-ju paraphernalia, also a sort of chair without a seat raised some distance from the ground; and under it a saucer-shaped, earthenware pot. In front of the chair was a large, water-worn, oval-shaped stone.

A few feet away from the chair was a raised mud bench, like a native bed, over which were spread some woven grass mats. To one side of this bench was a small, lean-to shed, under which was an "altar," and on that several more earthen pots similar to that under the chair, together with a lot of other things and an oblong native basket, of the kind used by women to take produce to market, containing a number of short sticks of various thicknesses, painted red.

The description given by the girl of the ju-ju compound was accurate in every detail, as we found the next day when we came to raid the place.

She went on to say that she was terrified, but could not escape. But she was still more afraid when she saw a big man dressed in a hooded jacket that reached his waist, seated in a chair on the other side of the bench. His lower limbs were hidden by a gaily coloured cloth—which was the usual attire of chiefs—but she could see by his hands and feet that he was very light-coloured. The hood attached to the jacket completely covered his face except the eyes, which peered through holes cut for them. On each side of this figure were seated two old, wizened men, both naked except for a small loin-cloth.

Besides these there were eight naked youths who would be about fourteen or fifteen years of age, one of whom carried a sort of heavy scimitar, and stood by the side of the principal figure. Four others had fans made of plaited palm leaves with which they fanned their chief, while the remaining three stood behind, evidently ready to receive instructions.

The girl's abductor led her in front of the hooded figure, and after going down on his hands and knees, and bumping his forehead eight times on the ground, rose to his feet and started to talk in a language not understood by the captive. The hooded man gave an order, and one of the old men rose up and stripped the cloth off her, leaving her naked, and after carefully examining her all over, evidently looking for scars, blemishes or deformities, made some sort of report to his chief which apparently was favourable, for that strange person produced a fish eagle's tail feather from his cloth and gave it to the abductor, who on receiving it retired through the entrance, now guarded by two of the youths armed with matchets. This was the last she saw of him. He had carried out his contract and received his payment.

Then the hooded man addressed the weeping girl in her own language. He told her she now belonged to the Afor-alum ju-ju, and that it would be necessary for her to take a solemn oath that she would always be faithful to the ju-ju and obey all its commands; that she was never to think of marriage according to her country's customs; that she would never leave the village and never cross the river.

Refusal to take the oath, he told her, would be punished by death. But if she took it she would become one of Afor-alum's priestesses, and would be dedicated accordingly. If she ever broke her solemn oath, she was warned, she would be tortured to death.

The poor girl naturally did not want to be put to death, so she agreed to take the oath and be dedicated, though not knowing what the latter signified. There were only the two courses open to her. One meant death at once, the other possible—but avoidable as she thought—torture in the future.

After the administering of the oath, which she was hardly in a state of mind to understand, she was seized by two of the youths, carried to the seatless chair, lifted by the ankles, and in this position her head bumped eight times on the oval stone, while the words of her oath were repeated over again to her.

She was then lifted into the chair and held there in a reclining position by the youths. Whereupon the hooded man approached, bringing with him the basket of painted sticks, and with these—one by one—he violated her, causing intense pain. She struggled and screamed, begging for mercy, but without avail, for she was in the power of a human fiend, and the youths held her fast.

One of the old men collected the blood which ran down into the earthen pot, which he placed on the altar with the others.

After this, sobbing and quivering with pain and shame, the poor girl was carried to the bench and laid on the mats. She felt the hot breath of the hooded man in her face and then must have fainted, for she remembered nothing more until she found herself in a small room, being washed and attended to by several women, who told her that she was now all right, and was a priestess the same as they were. She was given food and suffered no further ill-treatment.

When she had eaten, the women brought razors, soap and water, with which they proceeded to shave her head, leaving only a circular tuft about the size of a shilling on the left temple.

She was then taken to a room which was one of a long row of mud and wattle structures—a similar row was in front, forming a rude street. At the end of this street there were several mud houses, in which she afterwards found out lived numbers of old women, all of whom had their heads shaved and the circular tuft on the temple. This she knew later was the distinctive mark of the ju-ju's women, so that everyone should know them and not interfere with them. It was probably also a mark by which they could be identified should they attempt to escape.

These old women worked on the farm belonging to the ju-ju, collected firewood, fetched water, did the cooking and other domestic tasks; also acted as guard over the younger priestesses.

The girl had not then learned what were the duties of her new position, but she was soon to find out. The third day after her "dedication" she was told by one of the old women to sit at the door of her room, under the overhanging thatch of the mat roof; and noticed that all down the two sides of the street other women and girls were doing the same.

Another old woman then came along, conducting four young Aros who were dressed in brightly coloured waist-cloths and cheap blazers of the kind that are sold in the traders' establishments on the coast. These young men strutted up and down the street inspecting the rows of seated women.

Presently one of them stopped in front of her and saluted in the ordinary way, "Ndewo," to which she politely replied by repeating the greeting. He then took a fish eagle's tail feather from under his cloth and presented it to her. She took the feather from him without understanding why it was given; but it was immediately seized by the old woman, who caught her by the hand and presented her to the young Aro, who then drew her into her room, saying he was there by the ju-ju's orders. He remained with her till morning, then left, giving her nothing—not even a farewell word.

This sort of thing went on nearly every night, sometimes ten or more men arriving in the evening. But they always left again early the next morning. Being young and comely, the new-comer was the most often selected, and soon became pregnant; at which the old hags had been very angry.

A few weeks before her time she was taken to the old women's quarters and kept there, being made to carry round with her an earthenware pot about ten inches in diameter and the same height. Round the rim of this pot were eight semicircular knobs.

When the child was born she was not allowed to wash or attend to it in any way, but was forced to squeeze it with her own hands still alive into the pot, and carry it herself to the ju-ju, or " bad " bush, as it was called, where she had to invert the pot on the ground and leave it there with its living contents.

After a few days' rest she was told to return to her duties, no notice being taken of her by her companions in shame, who had all gone through the same experience, many of them more than once.

Not long after this, news of our approach was evidently received, and all the inmates of the ju-ju brothel were ordered to go and hide in the bush until the trouble was over, then they must return to their quarters. The girl had wandered away from the others, got lost in the bush, and was found by a young man, evidently a stranger who did not know the danger of interfering with a woman bearing the mark of the ju-ju, who wanted to marry her out of hand, thinking doubtless that he would thus get a wife without payment of dowry money. But she managed to give him the slip and met some other people from whom she heard that I was in the neighbourhood.

She had seen me on several occasions when I had visited her native village, and knowing that I was a good man (these are her words), she had no fear in coming to me for protection.

The officer commanding the patrol and I listened to this astounding and horrible story almost with incredulity. It seemed hardly possible that such a state of affairs could exist, and that such fiendish orgies should be perpetrated only a couple of dozen miles from my own headquarters-station. But the girl had told her story without hesitation, and so simply that her statements rang true, and it was impossible to doubt that she was telling the plain truth.

We questioned her regarding the whereabouts of the place she had described. She could, however, give no indication of its direction overland, as she had been lost when coming through the bush, nor even what distance it was from where we were. But she said that she had crossed no river on her way, so that we must be on the same side.

I then asked if the old women had filled their water-pots from the river. She answered that they did. So I suggested that she might be able to recognize the place if taken past it in a canoe on the river. To this she agreed, and that finished her examination. I gave instructions that she should be looked after, given food and drink, and well guarded; for I did not want her to escape or be spirited away until she had done the identifying.

The O.C. of the patrol and I then proceeded to make our dispositions and plans for the morning, but were not able to complete them until we knew whether the place was up or down the river from where we were encamped. We, however, decided to try the latter direction first, because it was apparently from that quarter that the girl had come in.

The next morning early, having commandeered two large canoes, we embarked; the party consisting of the O.C., the doctor, a non-commissioned officer, myself and two sections of Waffs. The O.C. and I, with one section, occupied the first canoe, in the bows of which I placed our lady guide, with the interpreter. The second canoe contained the remainder of the party, and followed close behind.

A fairly strong current was flowing, so there was not much paddling to be done except what was needed to steady the canoes, and I did not want to go too fast, as we might miss the spot. I had told the girl to keep her eyes on the right bank of the river and to tell the interpreter as soon as she thought she had seen the place. I also told her that her oath now meant nothing, as she would never be returned to the power of the ju-ju, but would be restored to her own village.

It is difficult to judge distances when travelling up or down a winding river such as the Imo is, but I reckoned that we must have gone about four or five miles, passing numerous "water-sides" at which canoes were tied up. But none of these was recognized by our guide as the one we were looking for, and I was beginning to think that it must be up river, or that we had passed it. Then, as we came round a bend, I saw quite a large landing-place, differing from the others in that there were no canoes tied up at it.

The guide got quite excited when she saw it, recognizing it at once. We pulled to the shore, disembarked and fastened up the canoes. Then, after leaving a guard over them and the paddlers, we turned into the bush, following the guide's directions.

I told her to lead us straight to the house where the "dedication" ceremony had taken place. She was somewhat doubtful of her ability to do this, as she had never been there since; but thought she would recognize the house if she saw it, because it was the biggest and best-built one in the village.

Following a well-worn path and passing a few scattered huts, we emerged into a clearing in which were two rows of thatched, single-roomed houses. This, the girl said, was the place where she had lived for nearly a year; and as we went along she pointed out the room she had occupied. But we were not concerned with this just then, so I told her to go on.

After reaching the end of the street, which was about eighty yards in length, we went along a wide path through more bush until we came to a rude fence over which was a sort of stile. I gathered later that this was the boundary or limit beyond which the ju-ju "priestesses" were not allowed to go.

At the other side of the stile the path branched into three, and here our guide was at fault. After some hesitation she led us down the middle one; but after going for about half a mile she stopped and said we were wrong. So we retraced our steps, and this time she chose the left-hand path, which evidently was the right one, as, after going about three hundred yards or so, we came to the river bank again. There must have been a big horse-shoe bend just below where we had landed.

About a hundred yards from the waterside we came to a large village, with quite well-built houses—mud and palm-leaf, of course—and for a native place very neatly laid out and well-kept. At one end of this village was a house considerably larger than the rest, and this our guide recognized as the one through which she had been taken to the place of dedication.

The village was deserted. Not a single fowl, goat or pig was to be seen; it seemed like a place of the dead. But this was no reason for neglecting ordinary precautions. Guards were therefore posted round the house and the various approaches to the village. Then we entered the house, passing first through a patio or space open to a courtyard, or compound as they are termed in West Africa. At the further side of this big compound was a small entrance closed by a stout wooden door, which we found to be fastened securely, apparently from the inside.

We were not long in battering down this obstruction, with the help of a log we found in the outer compound which had been used as a seat. Then, passing through the opening, we entered a very much smaller compound, the enclosing walls of which were much higher and thicker than those of the other.

This compound with its fittings and furniture we found to be just as it had been described to us by our guide, with the exception that the chair on which the hooded man had sat was missing, also the mats from the mud bench.

The place was tenantless. No hooded figure, no old witch doctors nor any naked youths were there. But there was the seatless chair, the lean-to building, the altar, clay pots and other rubbish; also the basket of red painted sticks, which I saw were phalloid shaped, resembling those found in ancient places, and supposed to have been used in the rites and ceremonies of the oldest of all religions.

There were other things also which the girl had not noticed. For in the basket there were several short, pointed knives, a rudely made pair of scissors and a number of sharply pointed hooks of various sizes. The doctor recognized these as implements that could be employed in the operation that, among the Ibo tribes, is almost invariably performed on women.

The compound itself was about twenty yards long and fifteen wide, and contained also several trees, the tallest of these being the one under which the hooded man had sat while the initiate was being purchased and inspected. The other trees were along one of the walls, and in these we noticed movements of the branches that could not be accounted for by the light breeze that was hardly enough to stir them. We went under them so that we could see through the branches, and counted eight good-sized monkeys. They were of the variety common to the country, and were apparently quite used to the presence of human beings.

Why these animals should have been content to remain where they were I cannot say. They were not tethered in any way and therefore free to go where they would.

The Aro mystic number eight was again to the fore, and indicated that the monkeys were connected with the ju-ju for some purpose. What it was I never found out, nor how they obtained food, for the last thing a native ever thinks of doing is feeding his animals. Generally he has no use for any that cannot pick up their own livelihood, except as comestibles.

However, we settled the matter very quickly. A few shots from a rifle ended their careers, whatever these had been. I did not do this killing from pure wantonness, but because the animals were a part and parcel of the ju-ju we had come to destroy. If they had been left, the natives who knew about them would have interpreted it to mean that the ju-ju had been strong enough to protect them, and that was the last thing I wished.

In the wall at the back of the seatless chair, and covered by two or three thicknesses of grass mats, was an opening of about three feet square. It was the only other exit from the compound, and was probably used by the hooded man when he wished to be mysterious in his appearances and disappearances. It led into dense bush at the back of the village.

As there did not appear to be anything more of any significance to see, we returned to the outer compound and thoroughly searched it and the adjoining buildings. But we found no other indications of the activities of the ju-ju. If there had been anything it had been removed when the " staff " cleared out.

Then we collected the various articles from the inner compound as " exhibits " in case we should ever have the luck to catch the chief offenders. These articles included the " dedication " pots, the basket of phallic sticks, knives, scissors, hooks and the seatless chair. They were sent down to the canoes by some of the men.

It was out of the question to demolish the walls of the place, they were much too thick and strongly built to be tackled by our small party, but I saw to it that this was done afterwards. In the meantime we cut down the trees and piled them against the front wall of the compound, heaped mats from the shed roof on top, threw in the eight dead monkeys and set fire to the lot.

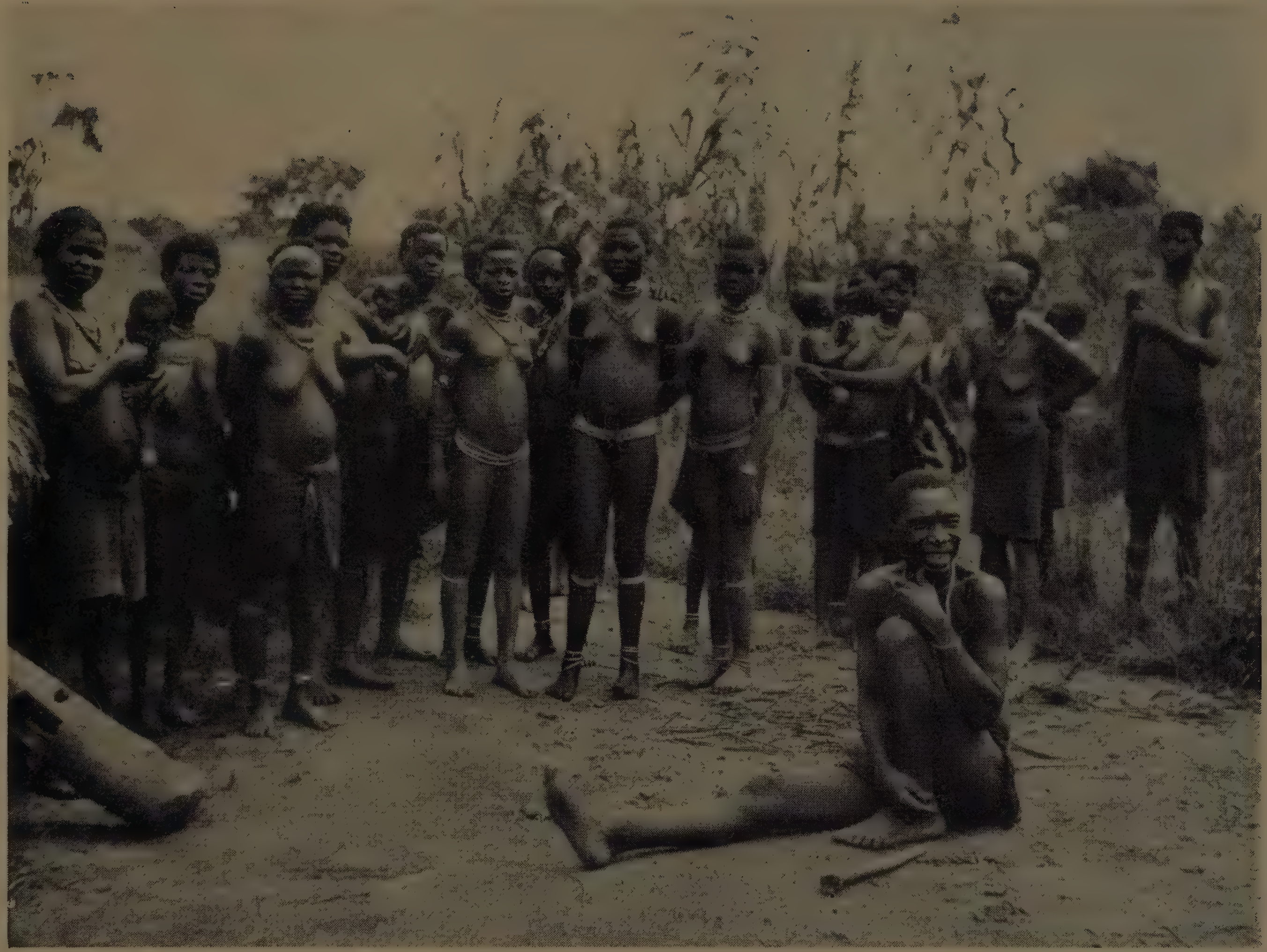
Very soon there was a fine blaze, and some of the sparks fell on the roofs of other buildings, which also caught fire. It was just as well, though I had intended to reserve these for further search for evidence at a later date.

We then proceeded to the "street of the brothels," but nothing of any significance was found there. And as they were now unoccupied, with every chance of remaining so now that the ju-ju was broken up, they too went up in flames. The rest of the village was left as it was. It was never reoccupied, and some months later when I revisited it the houses were in a state of dilapidation and bush was growing everywhere.

Retracing our steps to the waterside we re-embarked with our "exhibits" and the guide, returning at once to camp. Here we held a consultation as to the best means of getting hold of the hooded man. His girl victim said she could not identify him, as she had never seen his face, though it might be the same man who had occasionally visited the street of brothels during the day, doubtless to inspect it.

After a lot of searching and sending out of messengers I was able to find several of the younger "priestesses," who all confirmed what had been told by the first one, having gone through the dedicatory ceremony in the same manner.

I also got hold of one of the old women guardians, who after much persuasion and promises of reward gave me a certain amount of information about the ju-ju. But she swore that she had never seen the hooded man's face. When the ju-ju had been first started she did not know, but it was long before her time. She was old when she was made a guardian, never having been



FOUR OF THE JU-JU PRIESTESSES AFTER BEING RESTORED TO THEIR FAMILIES

through the ceremony as the others had, though she had to take the oath.

From what she said I gathered that this settlement of prostitutes under the guise of a ju-ju was a very paying proposition. Its owner was evidently a good business man, though he combined this with the satisfaction of his own perverted desires. He must have been a kind of sadist in his lust for blood, though sane enough to utilize his victims for gain when he had finished with them.

The frequenters of the establishment were mostly Aros, or Bonny and Degema traders on their way up and down river. These patrons had to pay in advance, and received as a receipt and token a fish eagle's tail feather, which had to be given up to the hag in charge. Without this they would not have been permitted to pass the fence.

It will thus be seen that the organization of the business was very complete, and was worthy of a better cause. It showed that the hooded man had brains and intelligence to be able to institute so complete a check on his receipts.

I asked the old woman why the mothers were made to destroy their children. But she could only say that he babies would have been in the way, and would have interfered with the profit-earning capacity of the "priestesses."

This was the first time I had come across a case of child-killing other than the common and usual destruction of twins, a custom that was practised all over the upper reaches of the Imo and Cross rivers.

Before finally leaving the camp I paid a visit to the ju-ju bush and found it a horrible place. There were adult remains in all stages of decay. Lepers, outcasts, deformities and the victims of small-pox were all thrown here either before or after death—too often the latter, I feared. It had been no one's business to bury them, so they had simply been left to rot. What the sufferings of those left there alive had been before they succumbed can be better imagined than described.

There were also dozens of eight-knobbed pots, each containing its pathetic little witness to the fiendish inhumanity of the hooded man.

The " priestesses " attached to the establishment were limited to eighty. Those who became too old were transferred to the ranks of the workers, displacing others still older who had passed further useful service. These last were driven into the bush and left to die of starvation. A new initiate was then bought, or stolen, to fill the vacancy in the " street."

The seven girl " priestesses " whom I had traced I was afterwards able to restore to the bosoms of their families, who may or may not have been pleased to see them again. I strongly suspected that in many cases these families had in the first case sold them to the hooded man or his agents, as the price they would receive would likely exceed the amount of any possible " dowry " they might get by giving the girl in legitimate marriage.

As for the hooded man, I was never quite certain what became of him. But I fancy he paid for his sins in another way than I had in view for him; for a few months afterwards a light-coloured man of the build described by the girl " priestess " was caught red-handed running a pseudo native court. He had been making quite a lot by issuing false summonses upon people and fining them heavily after going through a sort of farcical form of trial in which his creatures played the part of witnesses against the summoned ones. He was got up to represent a District Commissioner, giving out that he was opening a new District for the Government. He had his own police, court messengers and prison warders; all sufficiently like the real thing to deceive the ignorant population with whom he had to deal. He managed to do a lot of damage to the prestige of the Government before he was caught, since he varied his methods and increased his profits by a system of blackmail.

He got five years' hard labour, which must not have agreed with his constitution, for he died before his sentence expired. It was during his trial that I found out his parentage, which corresponded to what I had heard regarding the origin of the hooded man, though he denied to the last that he had had anything to do with the Afor-alum ju-ju.

A big man, standing fully six feet—a most unusual stature for a native—and built in proportion, he was certainly a fine-looking and imposing figure. He was credited with possessing hypnotic powers, and this was probably not unlikely. His skin was quite light in hue, lighter than an ordinary mulatto's, and he had blue-grey eyes.

The number eight seems to have been extensively used in connection with this ju-ju, and this appeared to confirm the view that the concern was run by an Aro, because eight seems to have been their mystic number.

There were eight principal Aro settlements, eight head ju-ju chiefs (real and proper scoundrels), eight market days in their country and eight days in their week, and always eight of any detail of ornament on their vessels or carved implements—as was the case with the eight-knobbed pots. I have never heard the reason for this, and doubt whether any of the Aros themselves could give one nowadays.

VIII

THE POWER OF IMAGINATION

WHEN among primitive peoples I dare say some travellers have come across that curious and inexplicable faculty certain individuals possess of dying at will. It is a psychological idiosyncrasy peculiar to such races, and as far as I know there are no known means of keeping alive any man or woman who has made up his or her mind that living is no longer desirable. It is sometimes a form of suicide, at other times it seems to be a sort of yielding to what appears to be the inevitable. Generally it is a matter of auto-suggestion, but sometimes the condition can be brought about by outside influences.

I have seen several cases of the kind, both among the Kanakas working in North Queensland, and among the natives of Nigeria. In each instance the subject had been brooding over some grievance or fancied injustice.

I saw two Polynesians die in this fashion. They were under the impression that they had not received their full ration of boiled beef and sweet potatoes from the head man of the sugar estate on which they were employed as indentured labourers, and imagined he had a grudge against them.

They were both strong, healthy men of twenty-three or four years of age, and neither of them had previously been ill in any way; yet they were reported one day as sick. The doctor could find nothing organically wrong with them. They were in no pain, but lay in a lethargic state from which they could not be aroused. Their companions could give no explanation, only saying that the men would die. It was their custom, and nothing could alter it. And die they did—within three days of falling "ill."

Apparently they allowed or willed themselves to die because of the impossibility of obtaining any redress for the injustice they believed they had suffered, or of prevailing against the ill-will they supposed the head man bore them.

The other cases were in different parts of Nigeria. One was that of a man who had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment by the native court, presided over by his own chief. He regarded his sentence as undeserved—probably rightly so—and having no one to appeal to he announced his intention of dying. The medical officer who examined him could find no trace of illness, and a subsequent post-mortem revealed no cause of death.

The other incident which I am about to relate did not, luckily for me, result in actual death, though it might easily have done so, and with very serious consequences to me. Fortunately I was able to stop the business, though not by means of the little medical knowledge I possess.

It was during my first year at Bende, where I was acting as District Commissioner, that it occurred, and was entirely my own fault, though, of course, I could not possibly have foreseen that my actions could have had so serious a result.

As a boy I was always very keen on sleight of hand tricks and ventriloquism, becoming quite efficient in both these accomplishments. In after life I kept them up, at first merely with the idea of amusing or entertaining my friends, but subsequently because I found them useful when dealing with unsophisticated natives, who could be impressed into acquiescence to law and order by my supposed magical powers. On many an occasion I had found these extremely useful in my work of opening up parts of the country that had not up till then come under the influence of the Government.

But this time my juggling had quite the reverse effect to what I intended and nearly cost me my life. It made me very chary for a time about using my powers unless I was very certain that nothing untoward would ensue.

In the outlying parts of the Bende District the natives were very shy and distrustful of the white man—doubtless because of the propaganda of the Aros. They were extremely reluctant to allow me to get into touch with them, or of giving me an opportunity of explaining that my intentions were quite friendly.

I at length hit on the method of utilizing the services of the chiefs of those towns that had already yielded to my blandishments, in the same way that Indians use tame elephants to assist in the capture of wild ones. I would tell those chiefs to invite the inhabitants of the particular town I wanted to influence to a play, that is, a drumming and dancing party; and for this occasion I would provide the necessary "dashes" or presents of tobacco, looking-glasses, beads or pieces of cloth. Then when the fun was at its loudest I would appear and quietly look on, thus accustoming the bushmen to the sight of me, and allowing them to see that no harm came to their hosts by my presence in the town. After this they were generally willing to listen to what I had to say, and eventually came into line and were willing to serve their neighbours as they had themselves been served.

One day I was at a friendly town called Oloko, where a native court had been established for some time, and quite a good rest house had been built for the use of the District Commissioner when he was visiting the place. This was in the centre of a clearing, far enough from the town to be quiet at night and yet near enough for any out-of-the-way disturbance to be heard. It was a mud and palm-leaf building, with kitchen shed and boys' quarters in the rear, and was quite comfortable and clean.

About eight miles from Oloko there was another town or large village called Omo-jakpa. This was one of the places I had not up to that time succeeded in bringing under my influence, having several times entered it only to find that its inhabitants had all "gone for bush." They were a wild and shy lot of people, but that, I was convinced, was merely because they did not understand my motives or appreciate that my intentions were not hostile.

This time I determined to employ my new method, and arranged with the principal chief of Oloko to send an invitation to the chiefs and people of Omo-jakpa to come to a play. This invitation was conveyed by some Oloko men who had married wives from the other town, and this gave confidence, for it was accepted—all the more confidently because of the presents the messengers carried with them.

When the crowd arrived I did not show up, keeping myself and the five constables I had with me out of sight, as, if the Omo-jakpa people had seen us, they might have suspected a trap. But I had arranged for the Oloko " band "—consisting of four or five drummers—and the local dance artistes to be in attendance. These went out to meet the visitors and joined forces with their " band," so that when the procession passed the rest house there was noise and excitement enough to keep everyone too occupied to notice any signs of my presence, the representative musicians of each town vieing with one another in making their tom-toms sound the loudest.

The guests were taken to the head chief's compound and there entertained with tumbo, or palm-wine, their chiefs being received in an inner room, as was seemly to their dignity. It was a gay scene, as I could see through the window openings of the rest house; everyone being in the brightest-hued cloth he could raise, while the chiefs were tricked out in all their finery of leopards' claws, cowries, copper armlets and coral.

After refreshments came the dance, and for half an hour the monotonous sound of the tom-toms mingled with the rising and falling notes of the chorus as the dancers shuffled and contorted themselves. Then a halt was called, and I knew that the head chief was telling his visitors of my presence. I wondered what the result would be, but was not long left in doubt, for I saw the procession re-form and start off in the direction of the rest house.

As it came nearer I saw that the Omo-jakpa people nearly all carried useful-looking sticks, and also that many of them had oblong parcels done up in plantain leaves. These I opined were their matchets—kept concealed during a friendly visit, but ready for an emergency. Each chief had his folding chair—purchased probably from itinerant traders—carried in front of him by a small boy. I noticed too that there were women with them—a good sign, because if they had anticipated or meant trouble they would not have brought them.

When the crowd arrived in front of the rest house I showed myself and began to speak through the interpreter. I explained that I had heard of their skill as dancers and would very much like to see them perform if they would kindly do so for my benefit.

This seemed to please them, and their chief replied that they would be quite willing to oblige. No time was wasted, and for nearly an hour I sat and listened to their infernal din, endeavouring to look as pleased as I could. Then, when they were all tired out, I spoke to them again, thanking them for the entertainment they had provided and reproaching them for having so long kept me away from their town and thus depriving me of so much pleasure.

They swallowed the flattery whole, thinking themselves no end of fine fellows. So I at once took advantage of their condition of self-complacency and delivered an address on the advantages of being friendly with the Government. I told them how they could live more securely—for I could protect them from their enemies—and how they would grow wealthy by trade and have many wives and cows, growing quite eloquent in my discourse as I saw I had captured their interest.

What I said appeared to please them, for many nodded their heads in approval. Then I told them that I would like to see another dance—may I be forgiven, for I did penance. Nothing loth they began again and I had to sit through another half-hour of it. The noise they made was deafening, and the more I smiled and pretended to like it the greater the efforts they made in that line, assisted by the generous supplies of tumbo I had provided for the entertainment. I felt I was getting along splendidly, and had done quite a good afternoon's work.

Presently the noise died down to some extent and I heard some commotion going on in the direction of the town. This turned out to be caused by a number of weirdly attired men who were coming in my direction. They were carrying various instruments for the making of noise and cutting capers to the "music" thus produced.

The crowd in front of me made way for the newcomers, who were, I was informed, the Omo-jakpa magic men. They were reputed to be able to do many wonderful things, such as turning men and women into snakes, leopards or goats. They were also supposed to be gifted with the power of causing themselves to disappear into thin air, and with the doing of many other marvellous things of a like nature.

I was at once interested, thinking I might learn a trick or two from them, and determined to watch them closely with the idea of adding to my repertoire. So I told the now somewhat tumbo-soaked chief of Omo-jakpa that I would very much like to see the wonderful things his magic men were said to be able to do. He gave the necessary instructions, and a space was cleared, I being in the Royal Box, so to speak, with the crowd ranged round in a semicircle.

After a few readjustments of dress, muttered secret incantations and the preparation of several curiously shaped baskets, the magic men leapt into the centre of the arena, waving sticks on which rags of cloth had been tied and uttering raucous cries, while making grimaces and contorting their ochre-painted bodies. Their heads were decorated with wing and tail feathers of various birds, while around their waists were leopard-skin belts from which depended small bells, goats' horns, human teeth and miniature carved wooden images.

The dancing of these people was simply the striking of various attitudes which were supposed to be awe-inspiring. Each time one of them changed his position he stamped his feet and let out a yell, while all his ornaments knocked and rattled together. The effect of this was not unimpressive, and I could easily appreciate that the bush natives would be very much impressed by the solemnity of it all.

After these preliminaries had gone on for some time, each one of the magicians came forward in turn with his basket, stick and cloth, with which he performed some simple and, to me, easily detected conjuring tricks. It was all very childish and I was much disappointed.

Then they proceeded to stick needles into their tongues, seemingly without inconvenience to themselves; but I could see that they did not actually thrust them in, though the spectators firmly believed they did; following on with a glass-swallowing trick. For this they broke up empty trade gin bottles, wrapping fragments in tufts of hair which they cut from one another's heads. They did not swallow these little bundles, but tucked them into their cheeks, at the same time gulping as though they were swallowing. I noticed that they got rid of them afterwards while one of their number drew the attention of the crowd by some other piece of "magic," such as washing his face in broken glass.

I tried the glass from the trade gin bottle afterwards and found that it broke without leaving sharp edges, and was therefore quite harmless. I should not have cared to try the trick with glass of a better quality, such as that used for window panes or tumblers, and I imagine neither would they.

This appeared to be the limit of their magic, so I asked the chief through the interpreter to order them to turn either one of themselves or myself into a leopard, a goat, a snake, or any other animal that might be convenient to them.

This request was not received in good part, and after some palavering I was informed that this was neither the time nor the place for the doing of such serious things. The same reply was given to my request that one of them would cause himself to become invisible.

I smiled inwardly at the replies, which proved what arrant humbugs these magicians were. But I took care to praise their performances fulsomely—for the people certainly believed what they had done to be real magic—and distributed largesse to them in the form of tobacco, as a reward for their very good and fatiguing work. Then I asked the chief if he would like to see some white man's magic.

His reply was a rather doubtful affirmative, for he evidently did not feel quite comfortable as to what I might do in the way of turning him into an animal of some sort. His people too were rather dubious until I guaranteed the safety of their chief.

However, I was determined to impress them if I could, so I went into the rest house and collected my paraphernalia, such as string, a couple of two-shilling pieces and some copper pennies and half-pennies. I knew that the coin of the realm was beginning to be known in these parts, so my tricks would be appreciated.

Then I got busy. My first trick was a very time-honoured one. I hammered a stick into the ground and asked the chief to keep his hand on top of it. Then I got the interpreter to tie my hands so that the slack string between them was round the stick, making me a prisoner as long as the chief kept his hand in position. I instructed one of the chief's retinue to cover my hands with a piece of cloth, and under it I freed the string from the stick though my hands remained tied. I walked round to show there was no deception, and then went back to the stick, told the man to cover my hands once more for ten seconds, and then showed myself a prisoner again.

Simple as this trick was it created something of a panic. Even the magicians showed signs of fear, and I thought for a moment that I should be left without an audience. But I suppose curiosity overmastered their fears; anyway they stayed and I proceeded to do some sleight of hand tricks with coins.

First I gave the old chief a florin, telling him to hold it very tightly, which he did. After mumbling a lot of gibberish and making mystic signs over him I told him to open his hand, and anything he found there he could keep. Of course when he looked there was no florin, but in its place a penny. I repeated this two or three times, changing the coin from a penny to a florin and back again alternatively.

This seemed to mystify very much all those who could see what was happening, and those who were too far away could judge by the expression in their chief's face that he was mystified too. Then I took the florin between my thumb and forefinger and threw it away—at least my audience thought I did—then produced it from the old man's ear. Excitement ran high then, and I could see others of the party digging their fingers into their ears to feel if by any chance they could find money in them.

It was all very amusing, especially to watch the amazement in the faces of the bushmen, and I warmed up to the job. But what tickled them most was when I started to catch coins in the air as one would flies.

This was making something out of nothing and was better than turning something into nothing. As I caught the coins I threw them on a plate so that they remained visible, and then proceeded to produce my last florin from the interpreter's nose.

This, figuratively speaking, brought down the house. Goodness knows what visions of easily acquired wealth flitted through the woolly heads of these simple folk. They wanted more and more, some begging to be taught the wonderful magic that could make money out of air. But I had no more coins, so had to stop.

Now had I finished here all would have been well. But I must needs exhibit my *chef-d'œuvre.* I had cut a piece of yam about half the size of an ordinary match-box, which I could palm quite easily, and with this I approached a tall, well-built young man who was standing near the chief, whose son I afterwards found out he was. He looked particularly healthy and strong, as could easily be seen, for he was naked to the waist, his only clothing being a brightly-coloured loin-cloth and various brass and bead decorations.

I selected this sable Hercules for my final experiment merely because he happened to be standing near. He was somewhat reluctant at first to allow me to touch him, but gained confidence after a few minutes. I told him to watch the piece of yam very carefully, but as it kept disappearing and reappearing again in different places he was not very successful. Eventually I pressed the elusive piece firmly against his bare skin just over his stomach in full view of the spectators. Mumbling unintelligible words and making cabalistic signs I covered it with my hand and made movements as though massaging the part. Then I removed my hand and the yam was no longer visible, and my hands were (apparently) empty. Of course it looked as though the piece of yam had gone into the young man's stomach through the skin.

He did not seem at all pleased with this trick, for he kept on examining the place where the yam had disappeared and feeling with his fingers for the lump he expected it would make. Then he stared with open mouth at me and at my empty hands—for I had got rid of the piece—evidently thoroughly frightened at the prospect of having the foreign body inside him.

This terminated the performance and I dismissed the people, who went away almost silently, overawed by something they could not understand. I had intended to improve the occasion by further words of wisdom about the advantages to be gained by becoming a "friendly" town, but thought better of it when I saw how much they were impressed by what I had done.

The magicians were naturally not very pleased at having been outdone at their own game. But I cared little for that, as I imagined that the reputation I had established as a ju-ju man would be extremely useful to me when I attempted to "gather" other villages into the fold.

I returned to my room for my evening peg, feeling very satisfied with myself indeed, thinking I should have no trouble with the Omo-jakpa people in future. Meanwhile the play started again in the town, and dancing with its accompaniments of tom-tom and tumbo was kept up till about nine o'clock.

In the bush one keeps early hours. I had turned in long before the din ceased, and was hardly conscious of the stoppage. But perhaps it was the cessation of sound that made me wake. At any rate there was silence for a spell and then another kind of row started which sounded as though a quarrel had arisen. I lay and listened, hoping to goodness that the hosts and their visitors had not fallen out over their cups. That would put the tin hat on my efforts as a peaceful penetrator, especially if the guests got worsted.

Hastily I got up and put on a few clothes, tucking a revolver into the waistband of my trousers, where it was concealed by the skirt of my coat. All the time the noise of quarrelling grew louder, but the note was changing. It became the snarling of an angry mob—and that mob was on its way to the rest house.

I roused the police, telling them to keep out of sight, but to be ready to come to my assistance if I called; and then went out to await the coming of whatever was going to happen.

Nearer and nearer came the angry people. Some of them carried torches, and by the light of these I could see that something was being borne along on the heads of those in the centre. Then I saw something else too—the flashing of sharpened matchets: the matchets that had been sheathed before in plantain leaves, but now carried bare and ready for use. I realised then that something serious had or was about to happen.

Presently I distinguished the leaders of the procession. They were shouting and gesticulating furiously, waving their matchets as they urged the others on. They were the magicians I had discomfited a few hours before, and they were evidently out for vengeance.

Following the magicians was the old chief of Omojakpa, who looked to be in a state of frenzy, for at intervals he would gather handfuls of earth and throw it over his head. I asked the interpreter what had caused whatever the trouble was. But he could tell tell me nothing except that the people in the middle appeared to be carrying a dead person on a native bamboo bed. And it certainly looked to be so to me.

I picked up a hurricane lamp and went out a few yards to meet the invaders of my peace, telling the interpreter to keep close to me, ready to translate what would be said. He did not like the situation any more than I did, but probably felt safer near me.

When the yelling and cursing mob came up I told the interpreter to ask the chief what all the trouble was about. But there was at first too much noise and excitement for him to make himself heard. At length, however, he managed to obtain some sort of explanation, mixed with demands for my head—the latter part of which I understood without his services.

Apparently the trouble was that I had ju-jued the old chief's son until he was dead, or on the point of death, and they wanted to know what I was going to do about it. Even then I did not tumble to what had happened, but told the people carrying the supposed dead man to bring him up so that I could see him.

What I saw was the body of the young man into whose stomach I had apparently rubbed the piece of yam. But on closer inspection I saw he was not dead, though he seemed to be very nearly so. He was moaning feebly and occasionally writhing with pain. Women were pouring water over him and others fanning him with leaves, howling and screaming curses at me the while. Why they should look upon me as the cause of the young man's sickness I could not for the moment imagine.

I inquired through the interpreter what the patient had eaten during the day, and then the tale came out. The cause of the sickness was the piece of yam I had put inside his stomach by means of bad magic. It was now growing, causing intense pain, and would kill him if I did not do something at once.

There was no doubt about the youth being in pain, and also no doubt at all that the pain could not be caused actually by the yam, which was, of course, not inside him, nor ever had been. The situation was absurd, but it was serious—and might end fatally. The notion was a curious one, but reasonable enough from these people's point of view, I suppose, for pieces of yam grew if planted in the ground—if they contained an eye—in the same manner as potatoes.

Obviously the thing to do was to make the people believe that I could take it out again. But I had not the piece. After doing the trick I had thrown it away. The matter was urgent. If the lad died—as he might at any moment—the people would take swift vengeance on me, or try to, at any rate. And those beastly magicians would do their best to see that I did not enter into competition with them again.

I had to decide quickly what to do. Then I bethought myself that there might be a yam or two in the kitchen at the back.

I left the interpreter to tell the people that it would be an easy matter for me to remove the cause of the trouble, and dashed into the kitchen, carrying the hurricane lamp and praying that there might be a yam there, and that the patient would not die in my absence.

Yes—there were several yams in the kitchen, one already cut in half, lying on the bamboo bench that served as a table. And—more luck—the cook had left his knife lying alongside the half yam.

It did not take me long to cut a piece the size and shape of the piece I had manipulated in the afternoon, and with it palmed ready I returned to the expectant crowd in front of the house.

They had begun to manifest signs of impatience, probably fearing that I had taken the opportunity to clear out. However, my reappearance restored confidence, and I had a space cleared round the sick man, at the same time telling the chief to remain close to me so that he could see what was being done.

I then made several passes over the patient's body, by way of allowing it to be seen that my hands were empty—of course only apparently so—and then started to rub the supposedly affected part. After a few seconds, during which there was absolute silence, I looked up and met the concentrated gaze of about a hundred pairs of eyes flashing white in the flickering light of the torches. It was a sight I shall never forget, for I knew that if I failed to convince with what

I was about to do, these eyes would flash with anger, and the fury of their owners would be let loose on my devoted head.

I continued the rubbing with a circular motion, and gradually, very gradually, the cause of the trouble began to appear, showing a little corner at first through my first and second fingers.

Then I pressed, the patient writhing afresh with the pain of it, and the whole piece appeared.

Being freshly cut it was moist, and that added to the impression I wished to give that it had come from inside of the black abdomen. I allowed it to fall to the ground, looked up, and pointed dramatically to it as it lay at my feet.

Immediately there was a roar of joy, mingled with amazement; and it was something to remember, while the effect on the patient was astonishing. He stopped his moans and writhings, opened his eyes and saw the, to him, cause of all his pain lying on the ground. He carefully examined the part of his stomach from which he believed the yam had come, and seeing no wound or any other mark, all his pain seemed to vanish. He stood up and shook himself much as a dog does when it wakes from sleep, then mingled with the crowd, the members of which danced round him and gave every sign of the joy they felt at seeing him restored to life.

Then they turned their attention to me, all their hostile feelings changed to gratitude; all their curses to blessings. I had to step back, holding up my hand, to avoid being surrounded and overwhelmed by the demonstrators.

A CHIEF OF THE DAMA TRIBE, OBUDU

SOME MINOR CHIEFS OF THE DAMA TRIBE, OBUDU

I told the chief that his son would now be all right—even better than before, and apologised for not having noticed that the piece of yam I had used contained an eye. If it had been a plain piece, I said (save the mark), it would have been quite good for him—just food for his belly.

Of course after that explanation I could not allow the piece of yam to be inspected, for I did not know if it contained an eye or not. So I thought it best to make it disappear into thin air, which I did, much to the satisfaction and wonder of all concerned.

The crowd then returned to the town, rejoicing and singing. There they resumed their play, which they kept up till the early hours of the morning.

I went back to bed, very thankful that what might have been a serious business had passed off so well, while at the same time enhancing my reputation as a ju-ju man. But I did not sleep for some time, being kept awake by the noise of the tom-toms and by my thoughts on the subject of the tricks imagination can play.

That the young man would have died had I not made him believe that the supposed mischief had been undone I was convinced. It made me resolve to be very careful in future.

I may say too that it was some time before I attempted any more Maskelyne stunts.

IX

THE DISPENSATION OF JUSTICE

LIFE in the bush is not all tragedy; there is much at times that appeals to one's sense of humour. Up to this I am afraid I have dealt only with its horrible aspect, but in this chapter I propose to say something about the lighter side.

In addition to my duties as administrator I had, of course, to dispense justice, and the proceedings in court were always something of the comic opera business. But they were taken very seriously by the people most concerned, and that after all was what most mattered.

In those days when any case had to be judged in which native custom came in, it was usual to have four assessors, generally chiefs of outlying villages, who were selected in rotation. They advised on matters which were beyond the scope of British law; matters which required to be decided on their merits and in accordance with local use and precedent.

The court house was built of the usual mud and thatch, but it was large and airy, having an opening some four feet deep all round below the eaves. The dock was big enough to hold six persons, and there was a second witness box, so that opposing witnesses could be kept apart when entering or leaving.

The minor officials, or court messengers as they were called, numbered six, and they all carried stout canes which they used indiscriminately over the heads of the public to enforce silence whenever the talk became too loud.

I was "sitting" one day when two very amusing cases came on for trial; wildly impossible cases as judged by English standards of what is fitting, but nevertheless they had to be dealt with.

Outside the heat was stifling. I was in my shirt-sleeves, which were rolled up; and I smoked furiously to drive away the flies, and to neutralize to some extent the effects of that indescribable odour, the "Bouquet d'Afrique."

The criminal cases had all been disposed of, and suitable sentences passed on several prisoners found guilty of larceny, unlawful wounding, slave-dealing or child abduction. I was very tired of the place and of the eternal petty crime, so it was with a feeling almost of relief that I closed the criminal case book and opened the one in which I entered up the evidence taken in civil proceedings.

The first case announced by the clerk was numbered 154, and was between Ewu-Woke[1] and Ewe-Wainie,[2] of Bende, plaintiffs; and Oko, also of Bende, defendant.

The plaintiffs claimed twenty brass rods,[3] which were stated to be owing to them. I wrote this down in the book, meantime calling for order in the court. Then I looked up and was surprised to see only one of the boxes occupied, that of the defending side, Oko the defendant being installed there.

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[1] He-goat. [2] She-goat.

[3] A brass rod was worth 3*d*.

"Where are the plaintiffs?" I asked.

"They are in the box, Sir," answered the interpreter.

Rising to my feet so that I could look over the rail of the box, I was surprised to see it occupied by two goats, a male and a female. I was annoyed at this, and at first inclined to censure the clerk and the interpreter for having allowed such a thing. But after glancing at their faces and seeing them perfectly serious, I knew that no joke was being attempted and no contempt of court intended.

The case was evidently going to be an interesting one, much more so than the wearisome debt actions that generally took up so much of my time. So I opened the proceedings by asking the defendant if he admitted the claim made against him.

"No, I do not admit the claim. They are lying——" began Oko.

"Baa! Baa!" protested the goats.

"Silence!" called out the court messengers.

"As neither I nor the interpreter can speak the plaintiffs' language they must have a spokesman," I said, gravely.

Whereupon a tall, middle-aged native in the body of the court rose and stated that he would act as spokesman. He gave his name as Okereke, and was duly sworn in by the process of "licking the ju-ju"—a bundle of bones, sticks and feathers. Having licked this object he passed it three times round his head, saying: "If I don't talk true may this ju-ju kill me and all my family."

This formality being over I ordered him to state the plaintiffs' case.

"It is this, your highness," he began; "I am the father and mother of the plaintiffs. They live in my compound and are good people. My farm is next to the defendant's, and he is not a good man. I know he is not a good man, for his mother was a loose woman, and all his relatives are adulterers."

"He lies! He lies!" shouted the defendant.

"Silence in the court," ordered the court messengers.

Order being once more restored, the plaintiffs' spokesman continued.

"Unfortunately," he stated, "the plaintiffs, who are good children, were very hungry one day and, not knowing the boundary between my farm and the defendant's, they unintentionally crossed it and ate a very little of defendant's yams and green food. The amount they ate would not have filled a mosquito's belly——"

"He lies!" shouted the angry defendant. "They ate plenty."

"Silence!" called out the court messengers, one of them taking his stand over the defendant's box, ready to use his cane at the next interruption.

"Proceed," I ordered.

"Then the defendant's wife, who is a bad woman, saw some green leaves in the plaintiffs' mouths, and at once started to cry out that the plaintiffs had thiefed all defendant's farm. Then the defendant, who was born of a baboon and is without sense, came and used bad words to my children and drove them away, threatening to kill them. The plaintiffs, knowing that they had not done any really bad thing, ran away and hid themselves in my kitchen, crying out at the foolishness of the defendant.

"Then the defendant, being so foolish and unable to think, took out a summons against me in the native court, although I had not been near his dirty farm, and claimed forty brass rods [10*s*.] for damages caused by the plaintiffs. Of course I had to obey the summons and the case was heard. Unfortunately your highness was not present that day, and the foolish chiefs gave judgment against me for the forty brass rods——"

"We were not foolish," interrupted one of the assessors. "The case was proved against the goats."

"Silence in court," proclaimed the court messengers.

"Of course I had to pay," continued Okereke, "as, if I had disobeyed the order of the court, I should have been sent to prison, which would not have been a good thing for an honest gentleman like I am. So after I had paid the forty brass rods and twenty for the cost of the summons, which hurt me very much—me being innocent—I returned home to my children the plaintiffs and told them what had happened. At this they were very angry and refused to eat or sleep. They told me too that the judgment was most unfair, as they had not eaten anything like the value of what I had been called upon to pay. So hearing that your highness would be sitting in court to-day, and knowing that I should get justice, I did what the plaintiffs advised me, and took out a summons for them against that evil man the defendant.—That is all the plaintiffs have to say; but I know they speak true words, as I have never heard them lie."

Having touched a pen in acknowledgment of the evidence read out to him, the witness stepped down into the body of the court again.

Then I called upon the assessors to ask any questions they wished. Very solemnly the four of them rose and walked to the box containing the two goats, and, after a critical inspection, returned to their seats. After which their spokesman gravely said that they had no questions to ask.

Trying very hard to keep my amusement from showing, I then called upon the defendant for his statement.

Oko, after having been sworn in the same manner as Okereke, and after his wife—who was also a witness—had been ordered to leave the court, began his story.

"What Okereke has said is all lies," he began. "I am a good man, as your highness knows, and Okereke is a thief and a father of thieves——"

"Baa! Baa!" interrupted the goats, who somehow seemed to know when to protest.

"Silence in the court."

"The plaintiffs ate far more than the amount I claimed," continued the defendant. "Only, being such a good man, I claimed very little. My wife is my witness, and she is a good woman who never tells lies. That is all I have to say."

Again I asked the assessors if they had any questions to ask the defendant, and after a whispered consultation, accompanied by many scratchings, grunts and expectorations, the spokesman rose to his feet and said that they would prefer the white man to ask the questions.

I then proceeded to cross-examine, through the medium of the interpreter.

"Did the plaintiffs eat all the produce on your farm?" was the first query.

"Yes, every bit of it. I have nothing to eat myself now."

"How big is your farm?"

After having gazed out of the court for a few seconds, the defendant described an area of about a couple of acres in extent.

Having made a note of this I asked, "How many yams did the plaintiffs eat?"

"I did not count, but it must have been many hundreds."

I could not help smiling at this answer, for the average weight of a yam in that part of the country was about three pounds.

"And how much maize and green food did they eat?"

"All there was—enough to fill the court."

"Did your wife see the plaintiffs eat all this?"

"Oh yes, and she was very vexed."

"Did she try to stop them from eating up all the farm?"

"They had finished it all before she noticed it."

"How long had the plaintiffs been on your farm eating all the food?"

The defendant thought a long time, probably wondering what answer his wife would give to this question when her turn came. "I don't know quite, but not less than one moon [one month]," he answered at length.

"How far is your house from the farm?"

"It is in the middle of my farm."

"Do you work on your farm every day?"

"Yes, every day."

"And all day?"

"Yes."

At this a murmur arose in court and there was much shuffling of feet until silence was once more obtained. The defendant was told to stand down, which he did, licking his lips; and this prompted some wag in the body of the court to remark that it was to wash the lies off.

Then his wife was called. She answered to the name of Etchi, and cast reproachful looks at the plaintiffs, or rather at the box which contained them, as soon as she entered her box, spitting viciously in their direction.

For this she received a rap on the head, delivered by one of the court messengers with his cane. After this lesson in manners she was duly sworn in on the ju-ju, and proceeded to give vent to her long-pent-up wrath, though a good deal of it was probably assumed for her husband's benefit.

"The plaintiffs are thieves and liars," she shrieked. "So is Okereke; he is not my friend, and his wife has borne twins."

At this horrible insult—for to bear twins is a disgraceful thing that brings humans to the level of the lower animals—Okereke's wife raised an uproar, screaming abuse suited to such an occasion. " She is a liar, a liar, a liar. A mother and daughter of prostitutes whose children know not their fathers."

Then the goats joined in, pandemonium reigning for a time, until the court messengers got busy with their canes, at length succeeding in restoring order.

After this Etchi, having received several more strokes of the cane on her head, proceeded to give her evidence in a more subdued manner. " I saw the plaintiffs come to my husband's farm," she stated. " They ate up all the yams, and I saw green stuff in their mouths. When I shouted at them they laughed and ran away. I told my husband what I had seen; he was very angry and took out a summons against the plaintiffs' father Okereke. He was given forty rods as compensation, and that is all I know."

When she had finished, one of the assessors volunteered to question her, both question and answer being translated to me by the interpreter.

" Was your husband on his farm when the plaintiffs ate all the yams ? "

" No, he was drinking tumbo in the house with his friends."

" Does he work every day on his farm ? "

" No, he never works there after it is planted. I and my children do all the work after that."

" How big is the farm ? "

The witness described an area of about five acres.

" Did the plaintiffs eat all the yams ? "

" Nearly all."

" And the other stuff ? "

" They ate lots."

" How long were the plaintiffs on the farm eating yams ? "

" Not long, only about two minutes; I saw them quick and drove them off."

At this answer, which differed so much from her husband's statement, a murmur of derision arose in the court, and there were loud grunts of disapproval from the assessors; not because of the obvious untruths, but because the evidence had been so badly prepared. It was, to their minds, bad staff work.

I then asked them their opinion of the case, but they did not appear to have any. So at my suggestion they retired for consultation.

During their absence I strolled over to the plaintiffs' box and had a look at the two goats. They were lying at the bottom, asleep and taking no further interest in the proceedings, evidently confident that they would obtain justice.

After an absence of about five minutes the assessors returned.

" Have you anything to recommend ? " I asked.

" We know nothing," answered the spokesman. " All these people are liars. What they say means nothing. So we would prefer that your highness should decide the case."

I had expected this, and had been busy sorting out in my mind the good liars from the bad. I therefore proceeded to sum up. I began by pointing out that if the two goats, which were not very big ones, had eaten the quantity of food they were stated to have done by the defendant and his wife they would have burst. And further, it was quite impossible for them to have eaten more than a mouthful or two in the time they had been on the farm as given by the last witness. If the goats had been only two minutes on the farm they could not have eaten any yams, so it was evident that the compensation of forty rods was too much. Therefore judgment would be given for the plaintiffs, with five shillings costs, to be paid into court forthwith.

At this there were cries of "he! he!" from the spectators, denoting general approval of the finding, and the noise awoke the goats, who, probably being hungry, baa'd loudly.

Then the principal assessor rose to his feet and solemnly addressed them. "The court says you are not guilty, so you are discharged," he said.

Thereupon, the door of the box being opened by the court messenger, the two plaintiffs leapt out with many baa's of joy, rushing out into the open without a stain on their characters.

They were followed by their "father and their mother," the real plaintiff Okereke, who also leapt with delight, snapping his fingers with loud cracks, and receiving congratulations from numerous friends, who had been waiting to see which side won before declaring their sympathy.

The only disconsolate person was the defendant Oko, who, amidst the jeers of his former supporters, advanced to the clerk's table and demanded a summons against the chiefs who had given judgment in his favour in the native court, claiming the refund of twenty brass rods.

"Why should you claim twenty brass rods?" I asked.

"Because I paid that chief twenty rods to give the case in my favour," he replied, pointing to one of the assessors. "He did what I paid him for, but now that has been changed. I want my rods back again."

He did not get his rods, and I made a note of the chief's name so that I could deal with him later.

Then the clerk read out the next case on the list, the interpreter rendering it sentence by sentence into the local dialect. It was a claim by a woman that she was the mother of a boy of about six or seven years of age. Her claim was disputed by another woman who claimed the child as hers.

It appeared that when the punitive expedition, and the subsequent patrols which pacified the country, had advanced on the town, many of the people had fled, and not all returned. The boy whose parentage was now in dispute was presumed to be one of these, because when questioned he remembered having lived in the town before, but could not recall his parents' names. He had just wandered in from the place where he had been living.

The first woman to make the claim had lost a male child during the flight, and hearing that there was a boy belonging to no one, had immediately seized and taken him to her hut. The other woman, who had had the same intention but was forestalled, went to the hut and endeavoured to drag the boy away.

Then the trouble began. The two "ladies" flew at each other with teeth and nails, soon losing what little raiment they wore, and were presently rolling on the ground biting, scratching and mouthing epithets that would have made a Billingsgate fish porter envious.

Then the friends and relations of the contending " mothers " joined in the fray, and made such a row that it woke up the native constable, who " proceeded to the spot," and with difficulty rescued the bone of contention, bringing him to the court, followed by a cursing, swearing, sweating mob of women, all of them in various stages of deshabille.

After a time, with the united efforts of the clerk, the police and several court messengers, partial quiet was obtained. Then the first " lady " rushed to the clerk's office to obtain a summons against the second " lady " for trying to steal her child. Whereupon the second one countered by clamouring for a summons against the first for having stolen hers.

Such, in outline, was the case as read out by the clerk. And all witnesses were ordered out of court, while the boy was brought in for examination. The poor little wretch was trembling with fear, evidently thinking that his last moments had arrived, and expecting nothing else than to be killed and eaten in accordance with the customs of his people.

But in a few minutes, when the expected did not happen, and the acuteness of his dread had passed, he realized that the white man was speaking to him through the interpreter, and that the words he understood were kindly and sympathetic. He was told not to be afraid, that no harm would come to him, but that he must answer truthfully the questions put to him. This he did to the best of his ability—at the same time keeping a wary eye on his possible "mothers," who were gesticulating, wringing their hands and shedding copious crocodile tears. But he was unable to tell his mother's name, or perhaps he feared that one of the two claimants might possibly bear the name that floated hazily through his befogged brain, and that the mentioning of it would cause him to be handed over to her willy-nilly. He could only say that he had been living in a town whose name he could not recollect, situated about two days' journey from Bende. There he had no particular abode, but obeyed certain people who gave him food; he in return bringing them firewood from the bush and water from the stream.

One day he followed some native traders, who did not discourage him, doubtless hoping to sell him when they were far enough away. In their company he had arrived at Bende and, by some instinct, had recognized it as the place of his birth. He therefore hid himself until the traders had departed, and on emerging from his place of concealment had been promptly pounced upon by the first claimant to parenthood, whom he stated he had no recollection of ever having seen before. Nor did he remember his second captor, or have any memories of the particular part of the town where she lived. He did remember that there was a ju-ju pond near his former home which had been used at that time for the keeping of the sacred crocodile that was fed on young children.

The two claimants, who had been kept away from each other by the court messengers, were now ushered into the boxes, facing me; their witnesses remaining out of court. Then the first one was asked to state her case.

This she did with alacrity and much volubility, and from her almost unceasing flow of words the distracted interpreter managed to piece together enough to render the case into English, or what passed for English in those parts.

"Oh, white man," said this lady, "you who know everything. That boy is my son. I born him myself, and with these" (pointing to her flat and leathery breasts) "I fed him. Long time since, when soldiers come, I lost him. That daughter of seven useless fathers has never born a son. She is a mother of goats——"

"You lie! You lie! You daughter of a baboon and a stinking she-goat," shrieked the second claimant.

"Silence," ordered the court messenger who stood over her, tapping her on the head—by no means lightly—with his cane.

"All the people of Bende know I talk true words," continued the first woman. "I get hundreds of witnesses outside who will tell you that this boy is my son. Give me my son. That goat-bearing harlot shall never have him, no, never. He is my son. He is my son."

This last sentence she kept reiterating until silenced again.

"How do you know that this boy is your son?" I asked.

"I lost a boy. This one was found. So he must be my son."

"Will you describe any birth mark or anything else by which you recognize him?"

"Yes, plenty."

"Show them to the court."

The claimant proceeded to examine the boy, who was, of course, in a state of complete nudity and who shrank timorously from her. She pointed to a small wound in the child's left leg, obviously a recent one, and possibly made by a matchet not many days before. "Here is a mark which I saw the day I born the child," she stated.

The assessors examined the mark and shook their heads. "She lies," one of them said.

This being the only mark visible, the woman again became voluble, refusing to answer any more questions, but repeating over and over, "This is my son. This is my son. I born him. I born him."

Her witnesses were then called; only three being allowed out of a score or more who had volunteered, all of whom were relatives. They gave their evidence glibly enough, but the burden of their tales was the same as that of the claimant—namely, that the boy must be her son because she had lost a boy and one had been found.

On appealing to the assessors for their opinion, the only answer I got was that the claimant and her witnesses were all fools. With this statement the second claimant heartily—and loudly—agreed, until silenced again. She fully expected that upon the discrediting of the other side the boy would at once be handed over to her, and was greatly disappointed when she found this was not to be; so disappointed, in fact, that she had again to be "silenced."

She was then told to prove her claim, which she started to do after much licking of the ju-ju, calling upon it to paint her all colours of the rainbow and suffer various kinds of sticky deaths if she did not speak the truth.

Her statement was a mere repetition of the first claimant's, and she also—being unable to find any other mark—pointed to the partly healed wound on the boy's leg, adding that she made it on the date of his birth so that she could recognize him at any time as her child.

Then her witnesses were called. They were also three in number, and were as vague in their statements as the opposing ones. I was puzzled, and the assessors could not help me. I was almost certain that neither of the women had any claim on the child. But in giving judgment I had to give a good reason for it, and one which would be appreciated by those primitive folk. It did little good to decide cases over their heads in such a way that they could not follow the processes by which the decision had been reached.

Then I had a brain-wave. Among the articles on the table in front of me—which included various ju-jus for swearing-in pagans—was a cheap edition of the Holy Bible, which was there in case some Christianized witness had to be examined. I remembered that, in the Bible, a case is described very similar to that I was struggling with. King Solomon was a wise judge, and had known how to deal with his case.

I took the Bible from the table and held it up. "In this book," I said, "is described a case very like the one here, and judgment was given by the wisest man that ever lived."

" What did this father of wise men say ? " asked an assessor.

" To prove which was the mother of the child he ordered that it should be cut in two, and a half given to each woman," I answered.

The interpreter had barely finished translating this when every man and woman in the court were on their feet shouting their approval, not excepting the two " mothers," who indeed were loudest of all in their praise of the suggested method. Then, before I could realize what was happening, the two were out of their boxes, and had seized the screaming boy, whom they laid on the table.

From somewhere or other there appeared a large, almost naked man who brandished a shining matchet. He might have been the town's Lord High Executioner in its unregenerate days.

This apparition advanced, spitting on his hands, a look of pleasurable anticipation in his eyes.

In a moment I realized that this was no farce, but the real thing. I sprang from my seat with one bound and grasped the raised arm of the executioner, at the same time calling loudly for the police to assist me. This they did very loyally, though they must have been disappointed at the stoppage of the spectacle they had hoped to enjoy, and after a sharp struggle succeeded in disarming the bloodthirsty savage.

In the meantime the two women, taking the opportunity thus given, endeavoured to carry out the proof in their own way by each seizing the boy by a leg as he lay on the table.

The unfortunate child must have gone through a bad time in these few seconds. He would certainly understand the meaning of a tug of war when he grew up, but at the moment his time was fully occupied. He screamed loudly, adding to the pandemonium that already reigned in the court.

Outside the surging crowd struggled to gain admittance. Here, I suppose they thought, was a District Commissioner after their own hearts; one who had no silly prejudices against their age-long customs. Here was one who was willing to provide a spectacle such as their savage natures needed; a spilling of blood for them to gloat over; even a feast of tender human flesh such as they had not openly indulged in since before the advent of the soldiers.

But those inside had realized that it was not to be, and loud were their murmurs of disappointment as I snatched from one of the assessors his staff of office, and with it cleared a space round the table. Then I used it lustily over the heads of the two furies who were trying to pull the screaming child in two, causing them to let it go. Whereupon they fell to in mortal combat, rolling on the floor, biting, scratching and doing their best to gouge out each other's eyes.

Their witnesses joined in, and the melee was becoming general, until, obeying my shouted orders, police and court messengers succeeded in separating the combatants and clearing the court; only the assessors, the interpreter, a couple of constables—each of whom held a "mother" in leash—and the boy remained.

One of the assessors, who had taken little part in the proceedings save to applaud the proposed test, now asked why it had not been carried out, and felt very hurt when—my temper being short like my breath—I gave him a succinct account of his tree-dwelling ancestors.

The whole affair had happened so suddenly, and events had followed each other so rapidly, that I, the would-be Solomon, still felt a little bewildered. I glared at the other assessors, who squirmed under my accusing eye. They had nothing to say, and certainly could not help me out of the ridiculous situation I had, managed to get into. But the case had to be decided, otherwise my reputation would suffer. I wondered what King Solomon would have done in such circumstances. What would the "father of wise men" have said if he had been confronted not only by the acquiescence of both mothers to the proposed division of the child, but by the unholy joy of the people at the prospect of a real "judicial" sacrifice? I had looked for things to happen in the orthodox way, and that one of the women would have waived her claim to save the child's life. But both had been equally keen to see the poor little devil slaughtered.

Turning to the assessors I said: "Oh, fools! You are not fit to be assessors. You ought to have known perfectly well that the Government would not allow such an act to be done. Why did you not wait to see what the wise one did? Now hear what I have to say. If either of these women had been the mother of the boy she would have let the other have him rather than see him killed. Both of them were willing that he should be killed, and that proves that neither of them is the mother. Both of them have lied, and their witnesses have lied."

"We know they are all liars," said the spokesman of the assessors, "we could see that from the beginning of the case. But if neither of the women is the mother, what shall be done with the boy?"

"The decision of the court is that the child's mother shall be presumed dead," I answered. "Therefore the Government will be his father and his mother. He will be sent to the Mission school in Calabar, where he will be taught sense—more than his fathers ever had."

The assessors grunted, spat, and did some more scratching; then decided that it would be wise to applaud this judgment. However much they had been disappointed by the non-culmination of the trial in what to them would have been the normal way, they realized that it had freed them from the necessity of giving advice that might have had the effect of embroiling them with the relatives of one or other of the claimants.

When the crowd outside heard the result they also applauded; but for a different reason, I expect. They thought it good policy, for no man among them knew the time when he might stand before me in court, or in other ways be in need of my good offices.

The next morning the boy, after having been renamed Solomon, left in charge of an intelligent native constable who bore a letter to the chief of the Mission station, in which the circumstances of the case were explained, and containing a request that the "ward" of the Government should be fed, clothed and educated, the cost to be borne by the grant to the Institute.

Years afterwards, when grown into a strapping youth, Solomon revisited the scenes of his childhood and dutifully paid his respects to me. Then and only then it was that I heard how my action had been construed by the people of his District, who had firmly believed that I had used my authority to acquire the boy, and had then sold him as a slave.

True, they thought none the worse of me because of this supposed smartness, because it was exactly what they would have done themselves had the opportunity been theirs.

X

The Snake Curse

MOST people nowadays hesitate to tell a snake story because they do not expect to be believed. And I suppose the one I am about to relate will seem even more wildly improbable than most. But for all that it is true, though I cannot even begin to explain it.

I have come across some curious things during my service in Nigeria, and from what I have seen I cannot help believing that certain individuals can and do exercise control over wild animals and fishes without actually coming in contact with them.

Near Ossidinge on the upper reaches of the Cross River there was an old ju-ju priest who, by whistling through a hollow reed, used to call six hippopotami from the lake they inhabited. They showed their heads as soon as the piping started, and gradually approached the old man, returning to the lake when he bade them. He did not feed them or offer them any titbit that they might be supposed to like. Yet they were apparently quite tame and allowed themselves to be handled. No one else had the power to call them, no matter how long the pipe was blown, and the animals would not come if one stood too near the charmer.

Again, in the Ibo country I have seen the keepers of the sacred ponds call up large jew fish by striking the surface of the water with a wand. In this case he did feed them, and they allowed him to handle them gently. He could lift them from the water and they made no attempt to escape. It might be supposed that these fish connected the beating of the water with the coming of food; but that would not account for the fact that they would take no notice if anyone else beat the water; the power to attract them seeming to be inherent in the priest himself.

The particular episode I am about to relate happened during the war, when I was in charge of the then newly-opened and very bush station of Obudu, which, as you know, was a District in the Ogoja Province. There were a few poisonous snakes in that part of the country, but nothing anywhere approaching what one finds in some parts of Australia or India. I had not, up to the date of the occurrence, ever seen one, though I had in the course of my duties travelled the District pretty thoroughly.

Certain troops were stationed at Obudu, which was not far from the boundary separating Cameroons and Nigeria. One day they had to leave in a hurry for a place called Takum, which was supposed to be threatened by the Germans in their attempt to invade Nigeria. The officer in command of these troops required an interpreter who could speak Hausa and also the Munshi and Dama dialects. And he wanted him in a hurry, as he had to leave at six hours' notice.

The only man I could find in the time who could do the job was a young court messenger who had been in Government employ for some years. I forget his name at the moment, but that does not matter, as he does not come into the picture except as the indirect cause of my troubles. He was quite a good lad and I was reluctant to let him go, especially as he was not very keen himself on taking the job. But there was no one else, so he had to go.

For a time I received excellent reports about him, then heard that he had been sentenced to six months' imprisonment for stealing a watch belonging to one of the European officers of the column. I always thought that the wrong man got punished, and that the young man was the victim of false evidence given by the real culprit. But that is neither here nor there; the point is that I got the blame for what had happened when the news reached Obudu, where the man had been a great favourite.

When I got up on the morning following the receipt of the news I saw a crowd collected round the gate of my compound, being prevented from entering by a policeman. It was most unusual for such a thing to happen, though if a thief had been caught red-handed, or a murder committed—in which case they generally brought the body—the people would collect in front of my office.

I saw that this crowd had formed a semicircle around the gate, and in the midst of it stood the most hideous old woman I had ever seen. She wore no clothing except a ragged and dirty loin-cloth, which barely reached her calloused knees. Her wrinkled and leathery skin was blacker than that of any native I had seen, except at the elbows and knuckles, where it showed a greyish-white. Her hair was plaited in greasy ringlets some three or four inches in length, while hanging round her neck were numerous fetishes: pieces of bone, teeth and other rubbish. Also she wore wristlets and armlets fashioned like snakes. Round her shoulders was twined a rather the-worse-for-wear stuffed black snake, while in her hands she held what I at first took for a live snake, but which was a piece of charred cane, about three feet long, that she twisted about in such a fashion that from a little distance it could easily have been mistaken for the real thing.

As I came out she glared at me from a single, blood-shot eye in a malevolent fashion, and started a flow of language which I could easily have recognised as abuse even had I not been able to pick out an epithet here and there. All the time she talked, or rather shrieked this abuse, she danced about with wonderful agility for anyone of the age she appeared to be, and twisted the cane in her hands until it looked for all the world like a snake about to strike.

I could not imagine what I had done either in my private or official capacity to make the old thing take such a dislike to me. I had never seen her before, and therefore could not have done anything to her personally.

The crowd behind her were quite silent, their eyes starting out of their heads, evidently expecting either the old woman to fall stricken by my magic, or her curses to wither me up. I might have taken summary action against her for disrespectful behaviour had I understood all she said; but she made such a row that

I could not hear the interpreter speaking, though I did notice he looked pretty scared.

I might also have had her locked up as a crazy person, for she certainly looked and sounded like one. But after a while I could not have given the order, for I felt as though I were being hypnotized, and could only stare blankly at her.

After going on at this rate for several minutes she seemed to grow exhausted, or had reached the end of her vocabulary of curses; for she stopped, with a final screech of rage, and threw her wand at me. It struck me lightly on the breast, so lightly that I hardly felt it, and then rebounded so that she caught it again. Then the crowd parted, allowing her to pass through, and she disappeared.

When I had collected my senses after this extraordinary scene I asked the interpreter, a young man named Awodu, what it was all about; and when he told me I gave orders for the old lady to be brought back. But she could not be found—at least so I was told. Probably the police and chiefs were afraid to arrest her when they saw that my ju-ju had not prevailed.

What Awodu told me was that she was the mother of the court messenger who had been imprisoned, and that she was a very, very bad witch. She blamed me for what had happened to her son, believing that she would never see him again, and intended to make me pay for it. When I asked Awodu how she proposed to make me pay, he said that she could control all kinds of snakes, which obeyed her commands even from a distance. Her curses, he shudderingly stated, were

AWODU, THE INTERPRETER

DISTRICT COMMISSIONER'S HOUSE, OBUDU

too bad to repeat; but the situation boiled down to the fact that she had put the snake curse on me. From this time onwards snakes would haunt me wherever I might go, day and night. Eventually a deadly one would get me and I should die a horrible death at no distant date.

My domestic staff were all out in the compound, and I saw them and the two policemen gazing at me with terror-stricken expressions in their eyes, as though they expected to see dozens of poisonous snakes advance on me from all sides and bite me to death on the spot.

I made light of the matter, however, trying to restore confidence in the boys. But I did not feel quite so confident myself, for I knew it was quite on the cards that snakes might be put in my way by the old lady's orders. There were many who would not dare to disobey her, nor betray her either, so great was the dread she inspired.

Meanwhile I could do nothing against her. The police were too terrified to arrest her, even if her whereabouts had been given away by those who knew. All the other people kept away from me, either from the fear that they might meet snakes intended for me, or because they did not wish to be asked for information they dared not give.

All the same I imagined it would be difficult for the old girl to get the snakes into my compound, for no one except my personal servants and my police orderly was ever allowed inside; and they were not natives of the district. Besides, I knew them to be loyal to me after many years of faithful service, and they had no dealings with the local people except in so far as they bought provisions for me and for themselves in the town market.

The only other Europeans in the station after the troops had departed were a subaltern in command of one section that remained, and a non-commissioned officer. But I saw very little of these, as I did a lot of travelling about my district, so did not think of mentioning the "curse" to them, except once and in a very casual way.

My clerk, the only one in the station, was a native of Fernando Po, a well-educated, intelligent man who is now a barrister practising in Lagos, and not at all the kind of man who was likely to be superstitious. Yet when I told him what had happened he looked very grave and, I thought, just a little scared. He said that it was quite true that some people could control animals and reptiles, though he knew that white men looked upon such things as impossible, and laughed at them. He solemnly assured me that some black men could do very mysterious things, and also that he believed that this old witch was quite able to do what she had threatened.

I discussed the matter with him for quite a long time, but was unable to shake his convictions. He stuck firmly to what he had said, and it was useless to argue any further with him.

However, I warned my servants and the police that people would probably be trying to introduce snakes into my house and compound, and told them to keep a sharp look-out, both for strangers and any snakes that might manage to get past the barrier. But they did not need any warning, for they had as great a horror as I had of poisonous snakes.

Nothing happened that day, but the following afternoon when I returned from my office and entered my bedroom I saw a beautifully marked, fat brown snake coiled up on the bed, just below the pillows. I was quite close to it before I noticed it.

The reptile was facing me as I entered, and when it saw me it slowly began to uncoil itself, its beady, dead-looking eyes fixed on me with a baleful stare, while its forked tongue began to dart in and out.

I did not stand there long, I can assure you, for I was unarmed, but ran out shouting for my boys to bring sticks. They came at the run, carrying bamboo poles. There must have been something in my voice when I called them that made them know they were wanted for this very purpose.

There was, however, no need for us to go inside, because the snake had come down from the bed, and we got him just as he put his head through the door of the room. He had done his last graceful glide, and was dead before my orderly, who appeared with a matchet, had decapitated him.

The reptile measured five feet three inches in length, and was of a very deadly species whose name I cannot now remember, and I did not get the skin. The head was buried by the boys in a place unknown to me; this being a native custom which is supposed to prevent the snake from returning and taking its revenge on its slayer; for without its head it can neither see nor bite. The body was beaten to a pulp and cursed in several languages—another custom the meaning of which I did not learn.

This was the first venomous snake I had seen so far, but it was by no means the last by very many. After its advent snakes certainly haunted me. They seemed to be everywhere. One was found in one of my boots when it was brought to me with the other to put on. I was not bitten because I had formed the habit when in Queensland of always looking inside a boot before putting my foot into it, as in that country they are a favourite hiding-place for small snakes.

Two more were found and killed in my office, one of them being coiled on the rungs of my chair. Another, a nasty venomous little cleat, about eight inches long, fell out of my stationery rack when I picked up an envelope. Within three days fifteen snakes, all of different species, were killed—all in places where I was likely to go. Had they been all of the same kind, and had it been the breeding season, I might have thought that there was a colony of them somewhere; but that could not be the explanation.

The business was beginning to get on my nerves, and my servants were getting so scared that I expected every morning to get up and find they had done a bolt. I made attempts—feeble ones, I admit—to make little of it all. But they were very unconvincing, even to myself.

Finally, I determined to leave the station for a bit and see if that would have any effect in ridding me of my unwelcome visitors; I was due for another trek in any case. So I sent my loads on ahead early in the morning, intending to catch up with the carriers on my bicycle later in the day, with the interpreter. Meanwhile I finished off some work I had in hand, had my lunch, and then went into the office to give instructions about what I wanted doing during my absence. While standing there talking to the clerk—flop! down dropped a medium-sized, black mambre at my feet. I did not wait to see it killed—the office staff saw to that. I was certainly a good deal rattled, for had I been just a very little farther inside the office at the time, the brute would have been round my shoulders, and I would certainly have been bitten. In that case it would have meant "good-bye" for me, since there was no doctor on the station, so nothing could have been done to save me.

I jumped on my bicycle and rode off, followed by Awodu on his, cursing all snakes and damning all old women while trying to persuade myself that all these happenings were merely the result of coincidence. But I was beginning to believe in the curse, and the worst of it was, I could think of no way of getting it removed, even if I had cared to admit my belief by having the district scoured for the old hag, and I had not quite come to that yet.

Apparently I had done myself no good by leaving the station. The snakes seemed to follow me round; for when I arrived at the first stopping-place I saw several basking in the sun on the low mud walls that formed the veranda of the rest house.

Then when I was asleep under my mosquito curtain that night I was disturbed by a "flop" above me, which I at first thought had been caused by a rat falling on top of the curtain. It was about one o'clock and pitch dark, and of course I could not see anything, but when I raised my hand it came in contact with something heavy that was making the curtain sag almost down to my face. Cautiously I touched it again, and felt the cold, clammy coils of a snake.

The sides of the net were tucked under the blanket, so that I could not slide off the bed unless I first freed one side, and if I did that it would mean that the top would be slackened so as to allow the loathsome thing to drop into contact with me. If I could have known that the snake was a harmless one I would of course have done this at once. But all the others had been poisonous ones, so I could not afford to take any risks.

Luckily the net was a new one and able to withstand the weight, but I trembled to think what would happen if it did give way, and had horrible visions of myself and the snake struggling together in the enveloping folds of the ruined curtain. The outcome would have been certain, though I should not have had long to think about it.

Then I yelled for all I was worth to my boys, telling them to bring lights. Luckily they heard me and came quickly, carrying hurricane lamps, which, however, gave but a feeble light.

"Snake! Snake!" I shouted. "Take care! Bring sticks and kill it," not thinking that they could not possibly do this while it was hanging in the bight of the mosquito net within a few inches of my head.

But they fled, screaming with terror, dropping the lamps in their hurry to escape. One of these went out. The other burst—or did something like it, for the oil ran out and caught fire, so that I was soon between the devil and the deep sea. Either I had to lie still and be burned in bed, or I had to risk being bitten by the snake while attempting to get out.

By the light of the blazing oil I could see the pink belly of the reptile gliding round in circles, evidently trying to escape from the trap into which it had dropped in the dark. Probably it was as keen to get away as I was, but that did not help me; and its fear of fire would make it all the more likely to strike at me if it got the chance.

I expected every minute that the mosquito curtain would catch fire, and began making strenuous efforts to loosen the folds of the curtain at the foot of the bed with my feet, reasoning that if loosened there it would have less effect in slackening off the top and making it sag further.

All the time I kept yelling for the boys and the constables to come and extinguish the fire; but it was not until I had freed the curtain at the foot of the bed and managed to wriggle feet first through the opening thus made that my two police came.

I was then standing barefooted in my pyjamas, fearing to run out of the house in case I might tread on more snakes, and cursing everyone for having been so long, for it seemed to have been an eternity to me. I told them to throw sand on the burning oil and bring more lights.

Presently my boys returned, having found and lighted another lamp, and they assisted the police to extinguish the fire. The snake was still hanging up in its jelly-bag, wriggling about and making frantic efforts to escape. I could see it was hopelessly trapped, and that we were in no danger. But I did not wish to destroy my mosquito curtain by shooting through its folds, nor to bespatter my bed with blood and "innards." Still, the only way to kill it was by shooting, since that could not be done with sticks.

Meanwhile I got into my long mosquito boots and stood on one of my "uniform" cases, holding my shot-gun at the ready. Then I got one of the constables, standing on another, to poke at the reptile with a bamboo pole.

After a lot of poking and levering he succeeded in dislodging it, and it fell with a thud on the mud floor. I did not give it time to get very far, loosing off almost as it fell; and fortunately my aim was true. The impact of the shot on its skin jerked its body towards me, so that I thought I had missed it, and fired the second barrel, cutting the creature in half and blowing a hole in the floor.

My second shot, however, had not been needed, as the first had hit it fairly, blowing its head to pieces and making a nasty mess of the bed and the rest of my kit, which took a lot of cleaning up afterwards, for the snake was a big one.

Then I had a stiff "peg," for I had been badly shaken up; and after that had a thorough search made for the dead reptile's mate, since there is generally a pair. But the search was fruitless, and I returned to my much-bespattered bed, keeping the table lamp burning near.

My boys and the two policemen had returned to the small hut, about fifteen yards away, which they occupied, and after an hour of wakefulness I was just dropping off into a much-needed sleep when I heard piercing screams coming from the servants' quarters. I was out of bed in the time it takes to tell it, and getting into my mosquito boots I took my revolver and the lamp outside to see what the disturbance was about.

I found the whole lot of my people huddled together at the door of the house, scared to death. They told me that a big snake had crawled over them as they slept on their mats, which were spread on the floor. Luckily none of them had been bitten.

We made a thorough search of the place, but not a trace of the snake could be found. Nothing, however, would induce them to go into the hut again, and I could see they believed that the curse was now extending to them. They had not minded so much when it had been limited to me, probably because they thought a white man was not so vulnerable to such things. But when they were included it was quite another matter.

There was no more sleep for any of us that night, and at daybreak I packed up and returned to Obudu, quite determined now to get hold of the old woman if I had to comb out the whole district.

We arrived at the station about midday, and I gave no reason for my unexpected return. But I expect the police and boys did, and that the experience in the rest house lost nothing in the telling. My loads were deposited in the usual places, and the bed set up again in the bedroom while I went into the office to give instructions that would set the hunt up after the old woman.

Later in the afternoon I had occasion to go into my bedroom, and on entering the door I saw a huge black snake of the mambre species on the top of some of my boxes, which were on a bamboo bench.

When the snake saw me it tried to climb up the corner of the wall, but kept falling back again. It was one of the largest of its kind I have ever seen, and I was unarmed. I called to the boy who was busy in the adjoining room to get me my shot-gun. But this was in its case—and the snake was sitting on that. So I then told him to get my revolver from the policeman who had been cleaning it, and when he brought it I aimed, perhaps too carefully, but the mark was very small, at the reptile's head. The ·450 bullet must have just grazed the skin of its neck, and had the effect of knocking it off the boxes towards me. It immediately straightened itself out, raised its head about a foot from the floor, and came right at me, with its neck swelled and flattened like that of a cobra.

Forgetting in the excitement of the moment that the recocking mechanism of my revolver was out of order, I must have turned the cylinder twice, with the result that it did not stay at full cock as it should have done, and the weapon went off before I had raised it sufficiently to get a line on the oncoming snake.

I felt a sharp pain in my right foot, and knew that I had shot myself. Luckily for me my boy had armed himself with a sharp matchet, and with that he made a swipe at the snake, completely severing its head from its body with one blow. It was a plucky action, for had he missed, the chances are that the snake would have got him. But had he not done it the snake would have got me. He certainly saved my life on that occasion, and I never forgot it.

As soon as the danger from the snake was over I turned my attention to my foot. On removing the boot and sock I saw that the bullet—a hollow-nosed ·450—had gone through between the second and third toes, then flattened itself out to the size of a florin in the iron-shod sole of the boot.

I plunged the foot into a basin of water in which I put several tablets of permanganate of potash. Then the young officer in command of the section of troops came in, and immediately sent over to the dispenser for some raw iodine. This he poured into the wound, and the pain was so excruciating that, for the first and last time in my life, I must have fainted.

The nearest doctor was at Ogoja, thirty-two miles away and along a very bad road. But, late as it was—nearly sunset, Awodu jumped on his bicycle and covered the distance in five hours, which, taking into consideration the state of the track—for it was but that—and the darkness of the night, was very good going. He and the doctor were in Obudu by half-past eight the following morning. I was eventually taken down river to Calabar hospital, and it was six weeks before I was fit enough to travel again.

When I returned to Obudu, the first thing I did was to consult my Fernando Po clerk as to the best way of dealing with the snake nuisance. He said the only way would be to scare the old woman by putting a bigger and stronger ju-ju on her, and thus compel her to remove the curse.

The advice seemed too absurd to take any notice of, and I could not very well follow it in its entirety. I did not mind using my skill at legerdemain to increase my influence with the bushmen, and had often done so. But when it came to a cold-blooded, native-fashion obeah ordeal I drew the line. But an idea came; I thought I could frighten the old woman—if I could catch her.

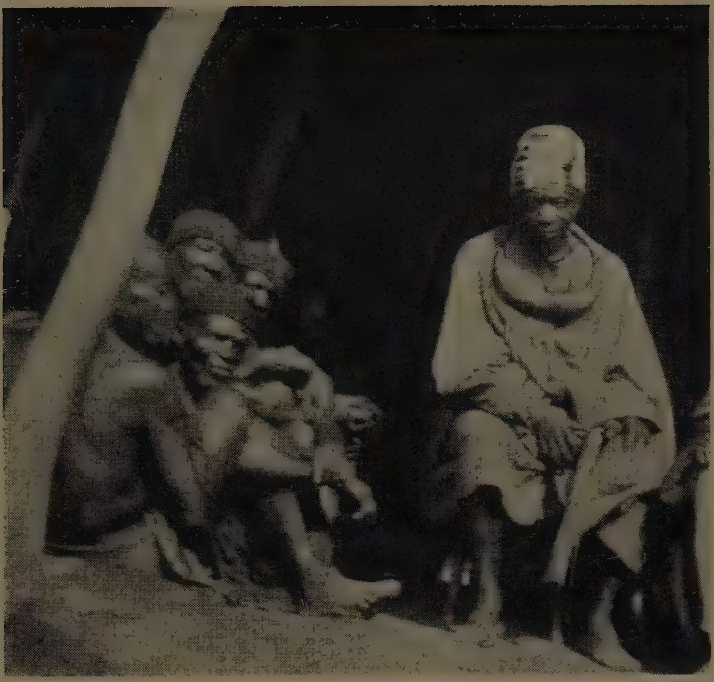
That, however, was the trouble. On making inquiries I was told that she had gone on a far, far journey. I knew this statement to be untrue, because when natives grow old they seldom or never move far from the place where they have lived.

So I gave warning to the chiefs near her quarter, that unless she was produced the next day they would be held responsible, and would be punished for disobeying the orders of the Government. This frightened them, for they saw that I meant what I said, and the same evening I was informed that the old woman had returned from her "far, far journey," and would be produced the next day.

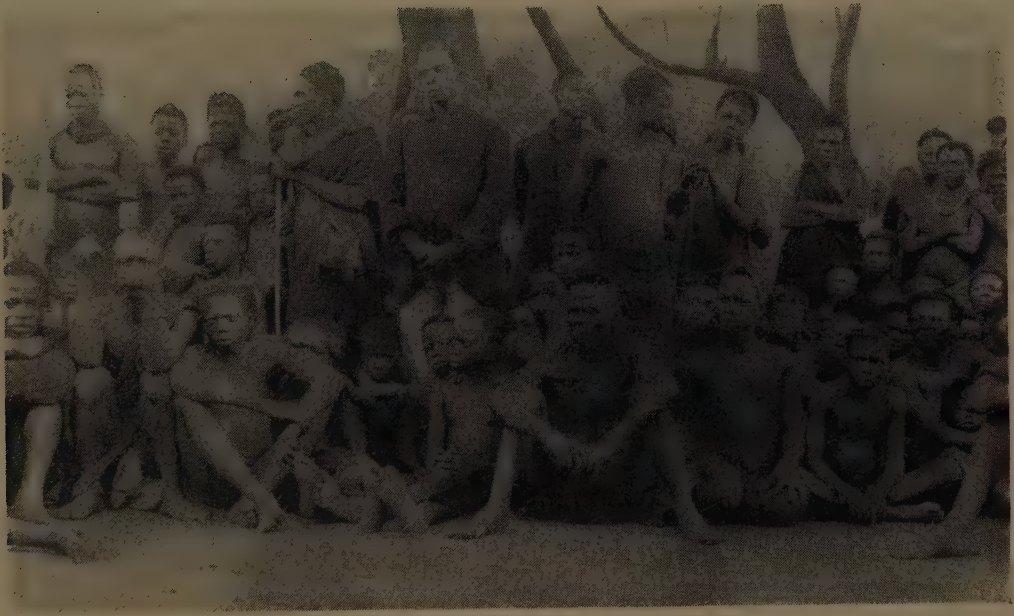
I sent back word to the chiefs that I would hold a "palaver" in the market-place of the town the following morning, at which they and the old woman must be present, together with as many of the townspeople as possible.

On my arrival at the appointed time I found a large crowd sitting all around the market-place, the chiefs being in attendance, and also the bringer of all my troubles, the old woman. She was squatting on a mat in the centre, looking very forlorn in her isolation.

Near to where the chiefs stood there was a post about four feet high, which had in former times been used for tying up slaves who were for sale or to be sacrificed. I went up to this and ordered the old woman to be brought forward, an order which she obeyed very reluctantly.



THE CHIEF OF OGOJA, PHOTOGRAPHED ON MY FIRST VISIT TO THE TOWN



OBUDU PEOPLE WATCHING THE LIFTING OF THE SNAKE CURSE

Then I began to speak. I need not repeat what I said, but I can assure you I did not mince matters, ending up by telling the crowd that I would put a stop to any more of this cursing nonsense. Then I turned to the old woman and let her have it, Awodu playing up to me in his interpreting, so that none of my words lost their effect when translated into the vernacular. When I showed rage he followed suit, and when I was impressive he was likewise.

The old thing soon began to show that my words were taking effect, for she started to shake and pick up handfuls of dirt; these she threw over her head, which is a sign of subjection. Then I brought in my ju-ju. I told her that if ever she was foolish enough to attempt any more tricks on me, or on anyone else, or call down any of her useless curses, I would see that she was bitten by teeth worse than any snake's, which would follow her wherever she went.

Following on these words I waved my arms several times above my head so that all could see, and took out my dental plates, with their two rows of shining teeth, and snapped them a couple of feet from the frightened witch's face, then put them on the top of the post for all to see.

That did the business. With a yell of terror and a jump that I should not have thought possible for one so aged, the old thing was on her feet and legging it as hard as she could, most of the crowd following her.

Then I replaced my plates and turned to my boys and the police, who were shrieking with laughter at the discomfiture of the witch. Confidence in me was restored, for they fully believed I had broken the curse.

Awodu assured me that this would be found to be the case and that I would not be troubled by any more snakes. And he was right. After that I saw no more poisonous snakes. They seemed to have changed their habits and deserted my house and compound.

The old woman lost all her influence and was driven from the town to seek an asylum elsewhere. No one feared her any longer, which might be because she had lost her supposed power of controlling snakes. At any rate I never saw her again, and never wanted to.

I had had a most unpleasant experience which I would not like to go through again. Some people will believe that the snakes were caught and brought to my compound. But that would not account for them being in the rest house where I had the experience of both snake and fire, because no one knew that I intended to be there that night.

XI

PEACEFUL PENETRATION

MOST of what has been written up to this has dealt with the country inhabited by the Ibo tribes, which are pretty widely distributed over the Niger Delta and along the upper reaches of the Cross River. This chapter deals with a little adventure I had in the country farther north.

About the year 1908 it was decided to attempt the opening up to civilized influences the lands that were principally inhabited by the Munshi tribes, who were supposed to be a wild lot of people, very difficult to deal with. This part of the Protectorate was practically *terra incognita.*

The town of Bansara, situated on the Ewayong River—a tributary of the Cross River—was known, to a certain extent, as a European trader and his assistant had established a small trading establishment there. But they did not remain very long, since the temper of the natives was uncertain, and there was no protection or security for their goods.

When I returned from leave I received instructions to proceed to this country and establish a new District. I was given a free hand in the selection of my headquarters, but not otherwise, because it had been decided that this new country must be opened up by peaceful and persuasive methods, and that no force whatever was to be employed, not even a show of it.

It did not rest with me to question the advisability of such an attempt, nor the wisdom of those who were sending me into the midst of a lot of bloodthirsty savages to persuade them to become civilized. But I thought a lot about it, I can tell you, having heard a good deal about the doings of the people I would have to deal with.

My instructions were to proceed to a place called Ibi (it should have been Iyibi, I found out later) on the Monaiya River, distance unknown; but it was believed that another European trader had a small establishment there. Here I was to clear a site, build a station, sketch the country (limits undefined), make roads, teach the natives to accept English money and explain to them the advantages of living under the protection of British law. Also I was on no account whatever to have any friction with them, but to do all I was instructed to do by means of persuasive words, and the only force to be used was to be that of argument.

This sounded very nice indeed to anyone sitting in a comfortable office, served by efficient clerks, and not a man-eating savage within a hundred miles. But it sounded neither nice nor feasible to the man whose task it was to carry out these instructions. For the chances were that he would not live long enough to measure the amount of his success.

I was told to draw on the Public Works for all the gear I would require in my future district, so I spent a few interesting hours in the stores of that Department, much to the despair of the storekeeper, whose stocks I considerably depleted.

No one in Calabar knew anything about the new country, and I had great difficulty in getting any information at all. But I managed at length to get hold of the Bansara trader, who was not returning. He told me a certain amount, most of which I afterwards found to be incorrect.

Some records in the Secretariat showed that a political officer had been some distance up the Monaiya River on one occasion in one of the flat-bottomed, steel canoes. His report seemed to infer that the natives living on the banks, the only ones he had seen, would welcome the establishment of a station. This also I found to be incorrect—or else the people had changed their minds in the interval between his visit and my arrival.

I managed to collect what I thought I would require in about four days, and loaded it into the steel canoe that was to take me as far as Obubra, the headquarters of the District of that name on the left bank of the river, and almost at the limit of steam navigation during high river.

Besides my own camp equipment and stores I took with me a full supply of stationery for starting an office, bundles of pickaxes, shovels, matchets, hoes, planks, nails and carpenter's tools. I also took a green canvas tent, in which I would have to live until I had built a hut, a hundred pounds of silver coinage —not much use where I was going—and four members of the native police force. These were principally for looking after carriers, not primarily for my own protection, as it was considered that none would be needed. Of course if I did get into any trouble I might use them, but with their antiquated rifles and limited supply of ammunition they would have been about as much use as a sick headache.

I left Calabar in a small, light-draft motor launch, which had in tow the steel canoe containing all my gear. My party, not including the crew of the launch, who would of course be returning to Calabar, consisted of myself, the four native constables, my cook and two other servants; not a very large army considering what was to be attempted with it. But I expected to augment it somewhat at Obubra.

After a voyage of about a hundred and fifty miles up-river, quite uneventful except for occasional groundings on sandbanks, when all hands had to get out and push, and the frequent breakdowns of the motors, I arrived at Obubra. Here I stayed for two days with the District Commissioner, who, when I told him where I was going and the nature of my job, expressed his delight that he had not been selected to do it.

It was at this place that I had to pick up an interpreter who could speak the language of the country I was bound for, as without the services of one it would be quite impossible to have any dealings with the natives, since even pidgin-English would be an unknown language in those parts.

With the assistance of the District Commissioner I hunted high and low for such a person, sending out to all the outlying villages without success. If anyone did speak the language required they evidently would not admit it, which argued that they did not want to go with me.

I was almost giving up in despair, when we were told by one of the warders of Obubra prison that there was a man serving a sentence of six months for obtaining goods by false pretences who said he could speak several of the dialects used in my new sphere of action. We had him along and questioned him, but were, of course, obliged to take his statements on trust, since we had no means of checking them. His English was extremely limited, but we hoped he knew the other languages better, and decided to make the best of him. So he was told that if he would engage for service with me the balance of his sentence would be remitted. He agreed to this and I engaged him, though afterwards I found that he knew but little more of the Yahe language than he did of English.

I changed fifty of the hundred pounds' worth of silver into brass rods, which were the currency in these parts, each rod, as you probably know, being worth threepence in English money. About two pounds' worth of these formed a carrier's load, so I would need twenty-five men to carry my money alone.

After this I set to work to procure carriers, and an exceedingly difficult task it proved, as very few men were willing to go where I was going. They said it was a bad country and that the people would kill them—and me too. However, I managed to enlist fifteen stout lads whom I intended to keep as a permanent gang on the new station—if it ever materialized. With these I was obliged to be content for the present, and pushed off again after saying farewell to the

District Commissioner, who, I could see, never expected to see me again.

I landed on the right bank of the river at a village called Afun-atam, some twenty miles above Obubra, with all my worldly goods; and here I had to send the launch away. When I saw it disappearing round the bend of the river I felt that now indeed I was fairly launched on my new enterprise, and it reminded me of the time when I had first arrived in the country. Only now I had the benefit of several years of experience.

At Afun-atam I had to remain two days, and had a hectic time getting a sufficient number of carriers; it was only after the use of many threats and the emphatic employment of my persuasive powers that I succeeded in making the so-called chiefs of the village obey the instructions from Obubra, and supply me with about a hundred and thirty, and they were a pretty poor lot.

I could not procure a guide, for the very good reason that I was unable to explain exactly where I wanted to go, so I had to travel by compass bearings along the numerous tracks through the bush in the direction in which I had gathered Bansara lay. When I reached that town I might possibly have better luck. But it took me two long, hot days to accomplish the distance, which proved to be about thirty-five miles.

I had the greatest difficulty at first in preventing the carriers from throwing down their loads and bolting. But after a while, when we were beyond the limits of their own chiefs' influence, they were too scared to go very far from me and the protection they supposed I could afford them. I suppose they knew that if they cleared off in twos and threes as opportunity occurred, they would have had very little chance of escaping capture and possible sacrifice by the local people, who were, as I found later, always in a state of war with each other. Being a comparatively large party, we were not interfered with, and that was lucky, for we could not have put up much of a scrap if we had been attacked.

For the first day we travelled through dense forest with very thick undergrowth, though there were occasional clearings where cultivation of yams and corn had been attempted. The paths were tortuous and narrow, being at times quite overgrown with bush, and we had to cut a way through.

Towards the end of the afternoon I thought we might strike some town or village, on the outskirts of which it might be possible to make our camp for the night; for we were striking patches of cultivation more frequently. And sure enough at about four o'clock we did come to a village that was surrounded by mud walls.

I was on the point of sending the interpreter, whose name was Odong, on ahead to see what sort of reception I might expect, when a furious fusillade started on both sides of our front. Cap guns and flint-locks were being fired continuously, while shouts and screams added to the din. Missiles from the guns, such as bits of old iron, copper and even pebbles, were whistling by overhead.

I thought, very naturally, that we were being attacked, and cast about for some means of resisting or preferably escape, for we were practically defenceless. The carriers were panic-stricken and would have fled had there been anywhere to run to, while the police were little better, though they did want to return the fire.

I ordered each carrier to lie down flat behind his load, thus taking what cover he could. How I managed to make them all understand what I wanted them to do I don't know. But possibly they would have done it just the same if I had not spoken at all.

The firing in front grew more furious, seeming to come nearer to our position, and presently I saw several natives in full war "get-up" appear from the bush, all armed with guns and matchets. They came swiftly towards us, and presently others appeared, firing off their guns as they ran, and then brandishing their matchets to the accompaniment of blood-curdling yells.

These seemed to be pursuing the first lot, and very soon both parties had vanished in the direction from which we had come. Then others appeared, and a running fight took place which passed within twenty yards of where I was sitting on my boxes, with my loads all scattered about in disorder, and my people crouching down as near to each other as they could get.

But the combatants, pursued and pursuing, so far from attempting to molest us, took not the slightest notice of our presence. Then I guessed we had stumbled into the midst of one of the many intertribal battles which were common in those days. It was an interesting fight, and I got a fairly good view of it as it drifted past and into some cleared patches. I saw several warriors streaming with blood, and several hand-to-hand combats with matchets occurred quite close to me.

How many the dead amounted to I never knew. But I saw one man killed by his opponent, who immediately cut off his head, which he picked up by the hair, and with yells of triumph executed several steps of a war dance, after which he raced past us towards the village, evidently with the intention of depositing his trophy in a place of safety before continuing with the fight. He was badly wounded, numerous matchet cuts showing red on his brown skin, but he did not seem to notice them.

The guns were still being fired at intervals, but the noise gradually receded farther and farther from us, and at length ceased altogether, possibly because the attacking party had been finally defeated. Then I thought it was time we were off, as it would have been foolish to wait there until the victorious warriors returned—they might not be so preoccupied then. So I gave orders for the carriers to pick up the loads and we resumed our interrupted march, passing through the almost deserted village, the gates of which were not closed. There were a few stragglers in it, but they took no notice of our party, either regarding us as neutrals or taking us for a caravan of traders. In any case I suppose we looked too big a company to be interfered with in the absence of the fighting men.

After going about a mile we came to a small river and a piece of high ground. Here I determined to camp for the night, as we were not likely to be disturbed by the villagers after the strenuous time they had been having.

They were also occupied with other matters, as we could hear by the sounds that came down the wind. High revels were evidently being held to celebrate the victory, and at them much palm wine and possibly trade gin would be consumed, together with—I strongly suspected—the remains of their late enemies. I therefore judged it would not be prudent to send for yams and corn to feed the carriers. Luckily I had some rice, so my people did not go hungry. Also they had brought a certain amount of their own food with them.

As I was getting my tent put up it started to rain, and very soon the downpour was torrential, accompanied by thunder and lightning. It rained hard the whole night, and we all spent a very miserable time. Only a few fires could be kept going under roughly constructed shelters of plantain leaves, at which it was possible to do a little cooking. I got no sleep, for the tent had got very wet while it was being put up, and in any case the rain was too heavy for any travelling tent to withstand it long.

Towards sunrise the rain stopped, and after an early breakfast I got the carriers on the move again. They were shivering with cold and damp, and most reluctant to start. But I knew they would be better walking than sitting on the wet ground, in the vapours the sun was beginning to draw up.

We must have marched farther than I had imagined the day before, because early in the afternoon we came to a town which, to my great satisfaction, proved to be Bansara. Here we downed loads in a large, well-shaded market-place, beside which the river Ewayong was flowing peacefully.

While the camp was being prepared I saw, coming out of a native hut, an old man with a long white beard who was evidently a European. This surprised me, as I had understood that the place had been abandoned by the traders who had been there. However, I went to meet the old man, who told me that his employer had left him stranded, and that he had been waiting for some word from him for about a month. He was almost in rags and had long been living on yams and plantains, while all he had in the way of luxury was a little trade tobacco which he smoked in a pipe he had made out of a corn cob.

I gave the poor derelict a good feed, the first he had had for many weeks, and a nip of whisky—for which he was very grateful. Then I proceeded to question him about the country, telling him my object in coming to it. He seemed to be very perturbed at this, and told me that the natives of the town to which I proposed to go were a very bad lot. They had driven him out and seized all his goods when he tried to trade with them, and it was a very near thing that he ever got away at all. He almost begged me not to go, at any rate without a sufficient force to make the people respect me. If I did, he said, I would probably never return.

This was cheerful sort of news to get about a country which I had been told would welcome the advent of Government. But I allowed for a little justifiable exaggeration, which was natural in the circumstances. If things were really as bad as he stated, how was it he had got away? However, I had no intention of abandoning the object of my journey, much as I doubted its feasibility, or the possibility of it succeeding under such a heavy handicap as my "special" instructions.

I gave the old man some tea, sugar, tinned foods and tobacco, to take him down river. Then I made a jam with an Okuni trader, who was in the town, to take him down to Obubra, where the District Commissioner would doubtless provide him with a passage to Calabar. I heard later that he had returned to his native Manxland, whence he had been lured by his late employer with promises of a fortune to be made in Nigeria.

It took me two days to reach the crossing of the Monaiya River, over which I was told the town of Iyibi was situated; and except for meeting various small companies of well-armed natives—evidently out on the war-path and not wasting their energies on us—the march was uneventful. But the road—save the mark—was atrocious and the heat intense.

On the second night we camped on the bank of the river, and crossed early next morning. Here I selected a piece of flat ground that crowned a little hill about half a mile up-river from the ford, and a mile from the town, on which to make my temporary camp.

I need not worry you with all my trials and tribulations during my first three months at this place, which I named Ogoja, a name it still bears as the headquarters of a province. It was pretty bad at first, and although I managed to avoid any actual friction with the natives, they were always unfriendly and would give me no assistance.

I tried to get them to work on the new station, to accept contracts for the building of my mud house, an office and quarters for my staff; and when I gave them money—as per my instructions—they flung it back at me with jeers. But I managed to carry on and got a few buildings put up by the fifteen boys I had brought from Obubra.

It was difficult to get letters through either way, and for the first two months I was entirely shut off from the outer world. I heard afterwards that mails had been sent—via Obubra—but they never reached me because the runners had been killed and eaten. The letters were mostly official matter, I believe, and I did not particularly regret their non-arrival.

As soon as my buildings were in fairly good shape I began to take little treks in the neighbourhood, sketching the country with the help of wheel and compass; gradually extending my sphere of operations when I found I was not actively interfered with.

I sketched the road to Bansara and then returned to Ogoja by the opposite bank of the river, camping near a large village, or town, called Okpoma. This place was situated in the midst of a heavily timbered piece of forest about two miles in circumference, forming a sort of island that was surrounded by quite a large stretch of clear ground.

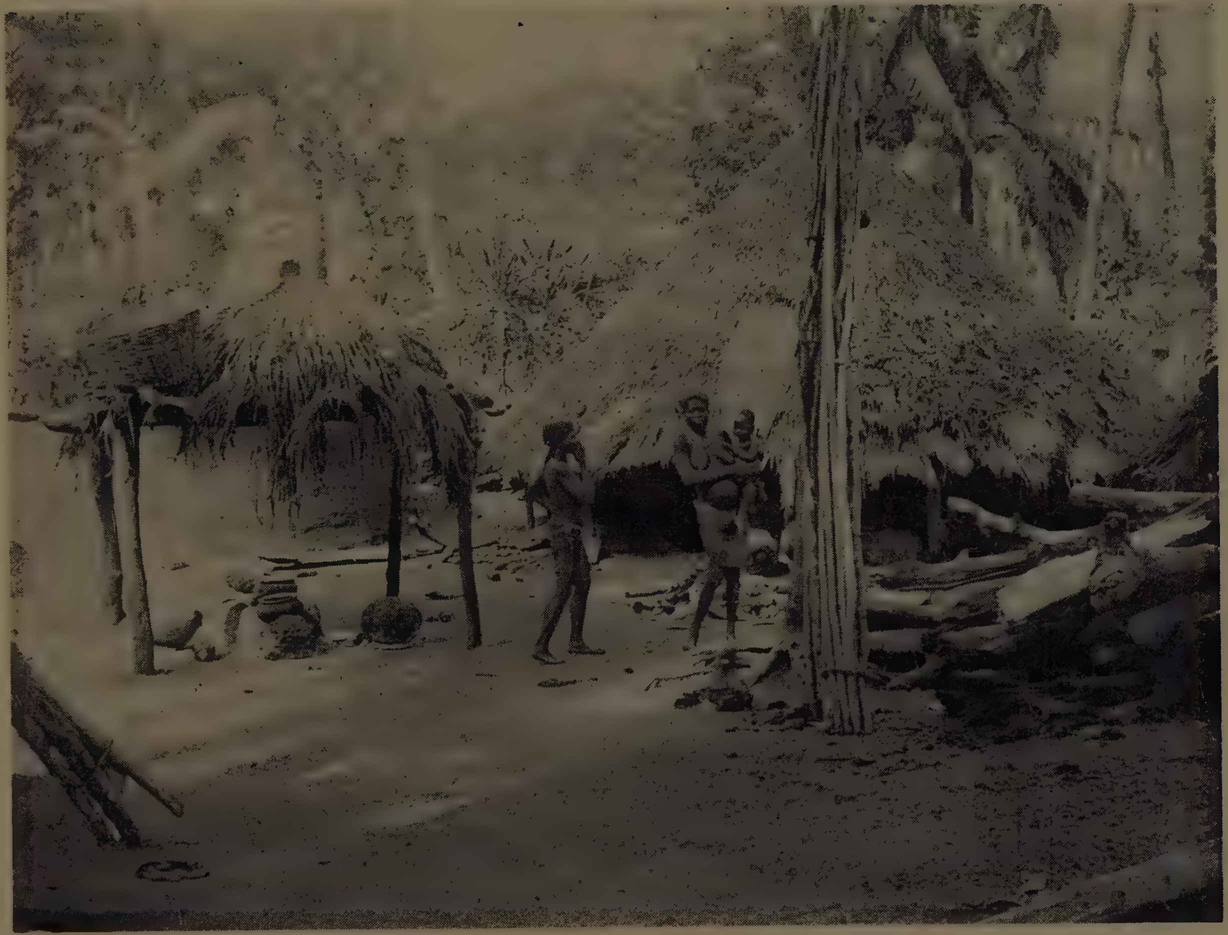
Just before camping I shot a fine cob (antelope), and knowing that there might be trouble with the inhabitants if I kept it for myself, I sent it to the head chief's compound, close to my camp. I then called upon him and made him a present of it, an action which he seemed to take as a matter of course. He was a stupid old man, who appeared to have little or no authority over his people, always excepting his wives, of whom he seemed to have a large number.

I was not at all happy about the attitude of the inhabitants of this town. They looked to be a very truculent lot; but as I did not interfere with them in any way they let me alone in a surly sort of way.

The next morning I continued my sketching and map-making tour, and had gone only about a mile along the path leading out of the town when I met a party of natives of both sexes. My own party was only a small one, consisting of myself, two police, two servants, eight of the Obubra boys, who carried my gear, and Odong the interpreter. One of the police headed this small column, he being well in advance and carrying a flag from which I took my compass bearings as I went along. Odong and I were well in the rear.

As we drew near to these natives I saw them behaving very insolently, pushing the police and carriers off the path, out of their way. This was a deliberate and intentional insult, and I determined to bear it in mind. But at the moment I could do nothing. I had no armed force at my disposal, and even if I had, my instructions would have precluded me from using it. So I had to allow the insult to pass, but took good care to be off the path when the blighters went past me.

Just as the last of the party was abreast of me, a



PART OF OKPOMA VILLAGE

young, well-formed woman, who was carrying an empty basket on her head, said something in her own language, which of course I could not understand, that made the other women shriek with laughter. Whereupon a powerfully built young man who had just passed me ran back to her, drew his matchet, and with one blow struck off her head.

I felt very sick at the sight of this, and very like running amok among the lot of them. But I knew perfectly well that it would serve no useful purpose, and would not only have cost me my life, but would have resulted in the massacre of my people also. So I pretended I had seen nothing, and resumed the march as unconcernedly as I could manage to appear. I did not even glance backwards, though I expected every minute to feel the matchet descending on my own neck. I can tell you it took some doing.

As soon as the two parties were out of sight and hearing of each other I asked Odong what the woman had said to make the man cut her head off. He then told me that the young woman had said, loudly enough for the other women to hear—and her husband too—"Ah, there" (pointing to me) "is a nice straight-haired man with whom I will sleep to-night."

This little jest had evidently been too much for her jealous husband. Probably also there was more than mere jealousy in his action, for she had publicly flouted him, and he would have been laughed at by his fellows if he had taken no notice of it. He had certainly "taken notice" very effectively. She would never do it again.

I felt in a way that I had been responsible for this brutal murder, so I kept my helmet on in future, in case any more " ladies " might be tempted to admire my straight hair.

The incident served to show the kind of mentality I had to deal with, and the nature of the customs I was up against.

When I reached Ogoja again I found that quite a lot of my own and some Government stores had been stolen during my absence. Most of the stuff stolen was iron or brass, which I knew well enough would be taken to the local " blacksmith " to be made into spear and arrow heads, steel being very scarce in the neighbourhood.

After putting in two days doing some clearing and levelling, and leaving work in hand to be done while I was away, I started another tour of " road " sketching in order to fill in some blanks on my map, my party being the same as on the last trek.

My route for the first day lay along the track leading to Okpoma, and by evening I had arrived at that place again. Not seeing any of the people working on their farms as I neared the town, I asked Odong, who had not improved very much linguistically, the reason of this. He replied that he thought the people were having a " play," that is, a dancing and drumming party accompanied by feasting.

I did not quite like the idea of this, knowing that at such times the natives were none too easy to deal with, being worked up by excitement and tumbo so that they were capable of committing all kinds of excesses. But hearing neither drumming nor singing, I concluded that the festivities must be over, and being anxious to connect my road traverse with Okpoma I pushed on, arriving in the big open market-place at the centre of the rambling town late in the afternoon. I had my tent put up in this place, there being no houses in the immediate vicinity, though I saw several men hanging about whose behaviour, to say the least of it, was unfriendly, as they did not reply to my polite salutations.

I debated some time as to whether I should remain the night, and eventually decided to do so, because I thought it better not to let the people think I feared them, and I wished to accustom them to my presence. It would have been better if I had gone on for a mile or two before camping, and I might at that time probably have got away without trouble.

As soon as we had settled in the camp I sent Odong to the compound of one of the chiefs to notify my arrival, and to request a supply of yams, maize and water for the police and carriers, for which I, of course, would pay. But he had not been gone more than ten minutes when he came running back again, his face the colour of ashes, in a state of great excitement. At first he could hardly speak, then, when he recovered somewhat, all he said was: "Make we go quick! They go kill we."

After a while he became a little more composed and I asked him what the trouble was about. He replied that he had gone to the chief and preferred his request according to my instructions, and the answer he received was what amounted in English to "Get to hell out of it and take your master with you." All the people had had a very bad play, he continued. They had all been drinking, the women being as bad as the men. He advised an immediate retreat, as they would most certainly kill us if we remained.

To this I agreed, and gave orders to strike camp, feeling glad that all my loads had not been opened. But before we had time to draw a single tent-peg, along came a seething mob of half-drunken natives, screaming defiance at me, and waving matchets, spears and war sticks. They seemed to converge from every point of the compass, coming along the numerous paths that led into the big clearing where I was.

Escape was now impossible, so I determined to try to bluff the oncoming mob. The carriers, police and my two servants—one of whom was the cook—took refuge in the tent and drew the flaps; not that that would have helped them much if an assault had been made, but I suppose being under cover gave them a sense of greater security. My Winchester repeater and bicycle were also inside, so that the small tent was full to capacity. My revolver was in the pocket of my khaki shorts, but I kept it out of sight: it might be needed in the coming trouble.

I collared Odong by the scruff of the neck before he could follow the example of the others, and together we stood with our backs to the closed entrance to the tent. I called out to the police to guard our backs, but on no account to shoot till I gave the word. I do not suppose they heard me, or would have had the "savvy" to do anything if they had; they were too scared.

I knew I was in a tight corner, and had nothing but my luck to rely on in carrying through my bluff.

It had held hitherto amazingly well, as I had got out of many a dangerous situation when a less lucky man would probably have been scuppered. It seemed this time that my number was likely to be up, but I was not going to give up or do anything to precipitate matters unnecessarily.

I shouted to my cook to stand behind me in the tent with my Winchester ready to hand to me when I reached for it. It was fully loaded with its magazine of fourteen cartridges. Inside the tent there was dead silence, for the fear of death was upon those in it. It was upon me and Odong too. Odong showed it—I hope I didn't.

The infuriated mob surrounded us, then paused—surprised, I think, to see me so unconcerned, or apparently so, standing by my camp table and chair. Possibly they had expected to see me take to flight, and then they would have had some sport in hunting me. As it was they seemed to be mesmerized into a state of immobility by my seeming nonchalance (I was far indeed from feeling nonchalant).

Odong was shaking as though he had an ague. Poor fellow, his nerves were not serving him as well as mine. But it was a struggle for me to control them, and as a means of helping them I pulled out my pipe, filled and lighted it, then puffed at it as though nothing out of the way was happening. Then I sat down in my chair with as much dignity as I could assume, though my heart seemed to be on the verge of coming out of my mouth, and my jugulars were pumping nineteen to the dozen.

Although I could hardly have done anything else in the circumstances, unless I had actually been assaulted, I am positive that my show of indifference saved me and the members of my party from being hacked to death on the spot.

Meanwhile the people in the crowd were arguing with each other, possibly concerning what they should do, though a good many were quite incoherent and could hardly stand. Then a hideous-looking, yellow-fanged man, evidently one of the chiefs, who was not quite so drunk as the rest, came towards me with threatening gestures. I sat perfectly still, but my hand closed over the butt of the revolver in my pocket. Had he come a step nearer than he did he would not have lived another moment.

I turned to Odong and saw that he had to a certain extent recovered from his ague. Possibly my manner had bluffed him too, and given him some hope that I was quite confident in myself. This was satisfactory, as I needed his services.

I told him to ask the ugly yellow brute what he wanted, and what was the meaning of this hostile demonstration when I had come to them in a perfectly friendly manner and done them no harm. I do not know if he translated my words correctly, but presume he got somewhere near it, as, after having heard them, the old deformity, chuckling drunkenly, replied.

Odong translated his words, which were that I was no friend of theirs. I was not wanted. But now that I had come they had no intention of letting me go. They had decided to have a feast of white "beef," but as they were not particularly hungry at present, this would not take place till next day.

Then there arose another argument among the crowd, which Odong told me in jerky fashion, as he could steady himself, was about who should be responsible for my safe-keeping. The chief assured them that it would be quite impossible for me to escape, as all the exits would be guarded.

Then an old hag of a woman, sitting on the ground because she was too old, or too drunk, to stand, had a brain-wave. She pointed to my feet and said something. Her advice was evidently considered sound, as another woman came up and between them they started to pull off my boots. While this was being done, Odong told me that what the old harridan had said was: "Take his feet off."

There was nothing to do but acquiesce. We were safe till morning, and I did not wish to bring about anything prematurely by offering useless resistance.

None of those present appeared to have seen a pair of boots before, as mine were handed round for inspection. My black socks below the putties seemed to puzzle them too. Possibly they had expected to see white feet.

What became of my marching boots I never found out—they disappeared. But that did not worry me, as I had another pair in my box inside the tent. If I lived I could get them; if I didn't, they would not be needed.

When the old woman had finished pulling off my boots she looked up and observed my arms, which were in those days covered with black hair, and, due, I suppose, to exposure to the tropical sun, the hair had grown to be very thick. It was because of this that I had been given the name of Abaja-Aka among the Ibos and was called Maigashi in Hausa-land. She looked at the chief and said "Winka," a word which I knew meant "monkey." Probably she imagined I might escape by taking to the trees. I certainly saw several of the men glancing at them.

Another discussion started then. And eventually it seemed to be decided that I was not to be left in peace. By gestures I was given to understand that I was to follow the crowd, which now began to tail away. It was no use refusing to go, as they could easily have forced me, and short of opening fire on them at point-blank range, killing as many as I could before they got me, there was nothing else for me to do. I had my followers to consider too. If I were killed they would have very little chance of escape, and I was responsible for their safety, as I had got them into the mess.

XII

PEACEFUL PENETRATION (*continued*)

I WAS taken along a narrow path through the bush, walking in my stockinged feet; and whenever I trod on a stone or a sharp stick I felt acute discomfort. This seemed to amuse my tormentors, who went off into shrieks of merriment at every stumble I made. They evidently appreciated that the horrible old hag's suggestion to " take my feet off " had been a good one.

Where we were going I had no idea. But I took care to observe the landmarks, so that I would be able to find my way back to the tent if ever I got the chance. Presently we arrived at a small clearing, and it was not difficult for me to see what had recently taken place there. If I had ever had any doubt about these people being cannibals there was no room for it when I saw the ghastly remains of the previous night's feasting.

The attitude of the majority of my captors was not violently aggressive, but their sense of humour was distinctly ghoulish. Also they seemed to be in that semi-lethargic condition which indicates repletion. Evidently they had fed well just recently, and, like tigers or cats in like condition, were inclined to play with their prey.

At one side of the little clearing were two large, three-legged iron pots, like those I remembered having seen in comic papers, where grotesque savages are about to cook a top-hatted missionary, who sits comfortably in the pot, grasping his umbrella and hymn-book. The difference was that these pots were standing with each leg on a large stone, and not slung from tripods as generally depicted.

A most unpleasant smell of stale, cooked "beef" came from these, though they were otherwise empty. Another smaller pot, covered with plantain leaves, was standing on the ground near the others. This one of my "friends" uncovered and pointed to with a broad grin. I saw it contained coarse, broken-up salt, evidently for seasoning purposes. Another of the crowd made some remark which I had no difficulty in grasping was some reference to the connection between the pot and myself. The rest roared with laughter, and I hated their beastly sense of humour worse than ever. But I joined in the laughter, not because I felt like it—I was far enough from that—but as part of my scheme of bluff.

My behaviour rather astonished them, I think, but nevertheless the man who had uncovered the salt pot now pointed at me and then at one of the empty pots, a gesture I understood to mean that this was the one in which I was to be cooked.

After this several of the principal ones approached me and began tracing out sections of my body with their forefingers, each apparently selecting his Sunday joint.

It is easy to talk lightly about all this now. But while it was going on, although I maintained a sort of sickly grin, I was in a state of frozen horror. How I managed to get through with it without going mad or running amok and shooting down as many as I could before they " outed " me I do not know. I would not wish my worst enemy to go through the mental tortures I suffered.

After this, another of these discussions they were so fond of started among the humorists. I gathered from the few words I understood and from the gesticulations of the deformity of a chief, who delivered a harangue of sorts, that it was the question of my safe-keeping. Several of them pointed to my feet, while others nodded their heads and laughed. Eventually it seemed to be decided that I should be taken back to the market-place, so I was hustled along as fast as I could stumble on my now sore and bleeding feet. But I appreciated that I had to thank the old woman that I was allowed to return. If she had not made the suggestion that without my " feet " I could not escape, probably greater precautions would have been taken.

When we arrived in front of the tent again I sat down on my chair, and saw the various dispositions made by the yellow-fanged chief. Two young warriors were told off to guard each path leading away from the clearing, and there must have been a dozen or more of these. Then the others gradually faded away, leaving only old yellow fang and his retainers.

As soon as they had gone I called Odong, who poked his head through the flap of the tent, looking like " potted death." He came out very reluctantly, and I told him to ask the chief to give me some yams and water for my people. This request seemed to tickle the old scoundrel immensely, but he answered very rudely—through Odong, of course: "Go to your kennel until you are wanted to-morrow. You won't want yams and water, but *we* shall."

Then, after several expectorations in my direction, he left us, and after that the only natives I saw were those guarding the paths, but they did not come near us. Presently I went to the tent and pulled aside the flap. The two constables, my servants and the carriers were still there, looking half dead with fear, hunger and thirst. Nothing had been touched and they had not been disturbed.

It was now beginning to get dark, and I was feeling the effects of what I had been through, coupled with the fact that I had had nothing to eat since the early morning. I suppose the others felt very much the same as I did, so I determined that, happen what would, we must have something to eat. So I told my people to come out of the tent and sit down outside, but not to go too far away. I then opened my one and only "chop box," which contained sufficient tinned food to last me for a week's trek, and dished out most of the tinned meats, biscuits and filtered water. They were wolfed at once as though none of the party had fed for a week.

While they were thus occupied I opened a bottle of whisky and had a good stiff tot, after which I felt better—for I had wanted it badly. Then I thought I could eat something, so I told the cook to bring out his box of pots and pans and light a fire, as I thought I might as well have a proper meal.

But in the dusk his actions had been observed; for suddenly from behind every tree near the tent there sprang out a dozen or more naked youths, who in a moment grabbed every utensil and pot, bolting with them for all they were worth. It was all done so quickly that even had we thought of trying to stop them we could not have done it, as they all ran in different directions.

The young devils probably knew they would be considered too young to join in the morrow's festivities or share in the distribution of my property, so they had taken the opportunity in the absence of their elders to annex what they could.

After this I had to make what I thought would be my last meal off sardines and biscuits, washed down by a little whisky and water. Luckily my hurricane lamp had been left in the tent, or it would have been stolen too.

I lighted the lamp and sat down in the tent to think things out. It was useless to appeal for ideas to any of my people, as they knew as little of the country as I did. I had only the foggiest notion, in the dark, in which direction the path leading to Bansara lay; for that was the one I wished to escape by. I had no intention of doing the obvious, and being trapped by taking the road I had come by.

Then I saw my road book lying near me, and remembered that I had made a sketch map of the place last time I had visited it. I took it up and started to work out from my former bearings where this path should be, and while I was busy there was a slight disturbance outside the tent.

I seized my rifle and went out to investigate, wondering if more thieves had come along. But as I came out, Odong informed me with sobs and tears that all the carriers had sneaked off into the darkness, evidently thinking I could no longer protect them. This left me with only the two policemen and my servants.

I was not too surprised. Indeed it was a wonder that the whole lot had not gone. But those remaining behind had either greater faith in my ju-ju or were resigned to their fate. But I could see that Odong was very much shaken, and that it would not take very much to make him follow the carriers.

The loss of these men would not, of course, interfere with my plans, but it meant that I would have to leave all or most of my gear behind; and that would seriously cripple me in my work if ever I did get away. Poor devils, their fears had been too much for them. I couldn't blame them, and hoped they would be able to get through the guards.

Suddenly the silence that reigned in the town was broken by the sound of a drum, and a voice called out loudly, repeating a sentence three times. Odong listened intently and then turned a shade greyer, while his jaw dropped.

I asked him what had been said, and he told me that the voice was that of a functionary whose duties might be described as those of a "Lord High Executioner," and that he had just given orders that the white man was not to be disturbed or interfered with in any way until the next day. That he could not escape, for all the exits were guarded; and that there would be a feast of white and black "beef" at midday. After each repetition of this there were answering cries of

"Ho, Ho," which came from all directions. Then once more there was silence.

I returned to my study of the sketch map, but almost immediately was again disturbed, this time by my cook, who in a scared whisper told me that someone was crawling very stealthily towards the tent.

Looking out I could see, faintly through the darkness, a dim form slowly moving towards me. I immediately covered it with my revolver, but did not fire. Then I heard "Hist! Hist! Maigashi." Luckily my boy could talk Hausa, so I told him to find out quietly what the intruder wanted.

I had visions of help arriving. But I was disappointed. The boy came back and told me that the visitor was the wife of a Hausa trader named Durinda. Her husband was in the town and had told her to come secretly to me and tell me to run, run for my life, as the Okpomas were going to kill and eat me and my servants on the morrow. He could do nothing to help me, except carry any message I might want to send.

I remembered that Durinda was the Hausa trader whom I had befriended at Bansara during my last visit there. He had been sick with fever, for which I had given him quinine and generally looked after him, probably saving his life. He was evidently grateful and doing all he could for me.

I told the boy to thank the woman and Durinda for their warning, but it came too late. Also to tell her that Durinda was to go quickly to the nearest white man and tell him all he knew. The woman repeated the message to make sure she had got it correct, and added again: "Run, Maigashi, run." Then she crawled away into the darkness.

I returned to the tent once more, thinking that if the worst happened, at any rate my people would know what had become of me, and my murderers would be punished, though I would derive little satisfaction from that. But I did not intend to be murdered if I could help it, so I picked up the map and got what I thought was the right bearing for when I left the place where I was.

Then I called my remaining people and told them what my plans were—showing them the direction in which we would have to go. When we reached the path, I told them, they must cut down the guards with their matchets and with as little noise as possible, and on no account give the alarm by shooting, unless I let them know it was absolutely necessary. If we crawled up to the end of the path without making any sound we might be able to surprise the guards, who would not be very alert after the night before. When they had disposed of the guards they were to make all speed along the road, and I would follow, bringing up the rear. We would have to leave everything behind except my bicycle. I had visions of myself out-distancing pursuers on this if all else failed and we had to scatter.

I then wrote a short letter, giving an account of what had happened, and what my plans were for escaping, hoping that it might be found if I failed to get through. I left this behind when I went.

By the time I had finished the night was well advanced, and it was one of the darkest I have ever

SERIKE DURINDA, PHOTOGRAPHED AT BANSARA AFTER HIS CURE

experienced. The stars had disappeared, there was not a breath of air and the heat was intense. Clouds had been gathering for some time, though I had not noticed them. Not a sound was to be heard; not a leaf rustled; even the cicadas had ceased for a time their night-long chorus.

I reckoned it would be about three o'clock, but I had broken my watch some time before, so could only make a guess. My men were sitting all huddled together at the foot of a tree near the tent, with their heads on their knees. They were either asleep or had assumed that attitude in the abandonment of despair.

I did not want to make my dash for safety until about an hour before sunrise, as if I could just get out of the forest and into more open country by daylight I would have a better chance of keeping possible pursuers at bay, by shooting at them as they advanced, with my rifle. If I started too early I would not be able to see to shoot. Luckily I had brought a good supply of ammunition—about a hundred and fifty rounds—not because I had expected to have to use it, but because it might have been stolen if I had left it at the station.

The waiting was very trying. Every minute seemed like an hour. Meanwhile little puffs of wind began to disturb the near-by foliage, and I realized that a storm was brewing, wondering if it would help or hinder me.

Then suddenly the sky was rent by a blinding flash of lightning, which illuminated the whole clearing for a second. It was followed by a deafening crash of thunder. A rush of wind followed, and a few minutes later it seemed as though the heavens had opened; for a deluge descended on us, not in drops but in streams.

My followers were not long in getting under the shelter of the tent, and in another five minutes in came my deserting carriers in a body. They gave me a scare at first, as I thought our executioners had come before their time, and nearly fired on them. Evidently they had not been able to get very far away, but had been hiding in the bush close by when the storm had driven them to seek shelter.

But whatever it was that had made them come back I was very glad to see them, angry as I had at first felt at their desertion, for now I would not be obliged to leave all my gear behind.

I immediately set them to work to collect all my loads, then gave Odong and the police my final instructions. First Odong and one constable were to attend to the two guards at the opening of the path, which was near a very tall tree. I told them to make for the tree and then wait for the next flash of lightning to show them the path. They were to be followed by the other constable and my servant as a reserve, one with his rifle and the other armed with a matchet. I would follow with the carriers, for they would need my support, and then the cook with my bicycle. They were to keep together as far as possible, so as to avoid any risk of losing each other in the darkness; and not to wait for me after the guards had been disposed of, but to push on in the direction of Bansara as quickly as they could.

The storm was becoming more violent every minute, and the rain was coming down in sheets. Flashes of lightning followed each other in rapid succession, and the roar of thunder was practically continuous. I had seen many tropical storms, some really bad ones, but never like the one I am trying to describe. At any other time it would have been terrifying, but in my present circumstances I welcomed it, because I knew the effect it would have on my enemies. I could judge of that by observing my own men. They seemed to be nervous wrecks, shivering and longing to be under cover.

But the advantage was also a disadvantage. I had literally to kick the carriers into action, cursing them till they got a move on. It was of little use telling them that their lives depended on the exertions they made. They required driving, and without energetic action on my part would have stood limply waiting for the storm to subside.

I had to leave the tent. It was too heavy and rain-sodden for us to burden ourselves with it. But I managed to get the remaining loads picked up, and we moved off in the order arranged. I was soaked to the skin, and the water squelched in my boots—the spare pair—as I walked, or rather trotted after my men.

The continual flashes of lightning showed us the way, and at first I thought the guards had deserted their posts. But I was mistaken. Just as Odong and the first constable reached the edge of the bush and had seen the path, a ghost-like figure appeared from under a tree, and it was presently joined by another.

By the flickering and fitful illumination given by the lightning I could see that these two wore goat-skin coverings, under which they were endeavouring to shelter their flint-lock guns so as to keep their priming dry.

They saw us too, and one immediately attempted to fire at us. But the downpour of rain had been too heavy for the goat-skin, which is a poor substitute for waterproof. The powder sputtered in the pan and failed to ignite the charge. Then the constable and Odong rushed him, and in between the rolls of thunder I heard a scrimmage going on.

The other guard had more luck, for his gun did go off. But the missiles with which it was loaded screamed harmlessly overhead. The noise of the shot must have been heard by the other guards, for the thunder was getting more distant and the intervals between its shocks greater. They had either kept their powder dry or were armed with cap guns, for they immediately loosed off, and for a time all was noise and confusion.

But presently I saw the way was clear. The other guard, his gun empty, and faced with odds too heavy for him, had disappeared, doubtless to tell the others where we were. Odong and the constable had apparently gone on, so I turned my attention to the carriers, urging them to get a move on. Then we dashed along the path at the double, stumbling over roots and slipping on the wet, clayey soil.

More guns were fired in our rear, and I could hear the screaming of the pot-legs as they fell just short of us. I did not return the fire—it would have been a useless expenditure of ammunition, as I could only have hit anything by a fluke in the darkness.

Soon we were well into the bush, and near-by firing had ceased, presumably because all the guns were empty. I brought up the rear, running behind and driving the loaded carriers forward. Now and then one would fall with his burden, and I had to stand over him to see that he picked it up. The path was more like a stream, there being fully six inches of running water on it.

The cook was unable to push my bicycle through this, so he lifted it up and put it on his head; and being just in front of me, it kept getting in the way, and my head continually came into contact with it in the darkness.

Guns were going off in the market-place at intervals, and that was a source of satisfaction, for I knew they could not be reloaded in the rain and darkness. But I suppose the firing of them did my enemies service also, since it aroused the whole of the town.

We must have plodded along for about a quarter of a mile, and had not passed any of the town compounds. But just before reaching the open country I saw the house of the old chief to whom I had presented the cob on my first visit to Okpoma. By the noise going on inside his compound one would have thought that his wives were having a cat fight; and this was evidently preoccupying him, so we got past without attracting attention.

The whole town was evidently awake now. Drums were being beaten, and shouts and screams were audible through the rapidly abating storm. Evidently a pursuit was being organized, and I heard the sound of cow horns being blown to summon the warriors. But the noise did not get any nearer. Either the hounds had not yet started or they were off the scent.

But we could not afford to slacken our pace, as our enemies knew the country, and might for all I could tell be heading us off by going down another track. Daylight was showing over the trees and the rain had abated, and I could see that we were well out into the open country. Here the soil was sandy, and the rain had soaked into the ground, so the going was easier.

In another quarter of an hour it was fully light, and then I saw, only a few hundred yards away, dozens of our pursuers emerging from the bush. I shouted to my crowd to push on for all they were worth, and told the cook to leave my bicycle and go with them, saying I would catch up with him later.

Then dropping on one knee I got my repeating Winchester to work. I did not take much trouble to aim, but just loosed off into the brown mass. At such a close range I could not possibly miss such a large mark, and the soft-nosed bullets—brought out for sporting purposes—must have done great execution. I had no compunction whatever in killing the brutes, for I had a good deal of my own to get back, and only hoped that yellow-fang was among them.

The Okpomas were evidently surprised that I could kill at fully three times the range of their smooth-bore guns, and it made them pause. I sent a few more rounds among them, then hurriedly recharged the magazine and jumped on to my bicycle, pedalling for dear life until I caught up with my retreating party.

They were padding along as if the devil were after them, and I was surprised at the distance they had covered before I overtook them. I proceeded with them for some time, pushing the bicycle along the smooth, sandy track. Then I stopped again to see if we were still being followed, concealing myself behind a tree trunk.

Presently I saw the brown mass again, advancing steadily, and waited until they came within easy range. Then I opened fire again, pumping a whole magazine of fourteen shots into them almost before they realized they were being attacked. Then for a time I continued to load from the breech, taking more careful aim so as to pick off their leaders.

Again mounting my bicycle I rode after my fleeing lot, who had now settled into a steady jog-trot and were going well, the police and my servants occasionally relieving the carriers of their loads.

After a while I again stopped, but this time I waited in vain for the pursuers to come. They had evidently had enough, had given up the chase, and we were saved.

I had occasion to be very thankful that I brought the Winchester with me, as I think you will admit, for without it we would have been in poor case. I had never expected to have to use it in the way I had, but only on game, which I came across now and then. How many shots I actually fired I do not know, because I must have dropped a certain number in the hurry of recharging. But when I came to make a check afterwards I found I had only eighty-one cartridges left out of a hundred and fifty.

After going on for about two miles after the pursuit had ceased, I judged it would be safe to indulge in a short rest. I was pretty well done in, and I could see the carriers were too. So we halted on the bank of a little stream, and I shared out what remained of the contents of my chop box.

Then we started again and put in a good twenty miles before reaching the river opposite Bansara. The following day, after replenishing our food supplies, I started on the return journey to my headquarters.

Subsequent events were more amusing than dangerous. I did not make my adventure the subject of a special report, as it was all in the day's work, but included it in my monthly returns to Calabar.

The result of this was that news of my death was received at Calabar before the monthly report. Old Durinda must have got his message through pretty quickly.

For some weeks after I was supposed to have been killed and eaten I carried on my job of "peaceful penetration," though during that time I took good care to give Okpoma a wide berth, for I had no desire to be caught again. I might not be given the opportunity to escape next time, but killed off in summary fashion.

But one day when I was sitting in my bush office the police orderly rushed in and reported: "Plenty soldier come!" I went out and saw he was quite right. Winding up the hill was a khaki-clad company of Waffs; and walking at their head a European officer whom I knew very well.

When I greeted him he nearly fell down with astonishment. "Why, I thought you had been scuppered!" he said. "Calabar got news of it and I was ordered off at twenty-four hours' notice to investigate and punish."

"The report was evidently a gross exaggeration," I replied, plagiarizing Mark Twain.

He came in and had a drink, and in spite of his protestations of joy at my survival I could see he was a good deal disappointed at being done out of a promising show. Like all soldier men, he had come out to West Africa for active service, and this was his first command. I knew how it was with him by the way he talked, though he really did his best not to let me see it.

But I saw here an opportunity I could not afford to miss, and played the part of tempter. Here was the heaven-sent chance to give my Okpoma friends a lesson they badly needed.

Insidiously I suggested, and his ears were inclined to hear. "Why not go on?" I said. "You *might* not have found me here."

He fell; and together we went to Okpoma. To their credit I must say that the townspeople put up quite a good scrap. But in a few hours their town was burning and they had "gone for bush."

They had their lesson and never molested me again. I could have walked alone into their rebuilt town, and out again quite safely. I had penetrated—but not quite peacefully.

L'ENVOI

HOW rapid the rate of progress has been. Only twenty-five years have passed since the events narrated by Hives took place. The country in which they occurred was wild and practically unknown. It was inhabited by savage tribes, who were continually at war with their neighbours, living under the thumb of the wily Aros, and considering the killing of one another a virtue instead of a crime; revelling in the gruesome customs of human sacrifice and trial by ordeal, and considering cannibalism a matter of course.

Parents would sell their children to the highest bidder without compunction, or pawn them to their creditors for debts incurred. Children, male or female, were regularly stolen by the rogues of the place and sold to big chiefs or ju-ju priests. There was no security of life or property. Prædial larceny was a capital offence if practised on members of the same tribe, but a virtue if committed on stranger villages.

There were no roads, and communication was restricted to the limits of the tribal boundaries. It meant death or slavery for a member of any tribe to leave the neighbourhood of his home, unless he went under the protection of an Aro—who would charge heavily for this service. Bound by fear of the supernatural, the people were fatalists, prepared to resign themselves to death whenever they believed it to be inevitable.

In the short space of twenty-five years these natives have become a happy and contented people, travelling in perfect safety in Nigeria and elsewhere. They have no fear of attack by their neighbours, and the Aros no longer have any power over them. No human sacrifices are made, and child-stealing is a rare occurrence. Hundreds of miles of well-made roads are now in existence. Motor vans and lorries carry produce from the outlying places to the factories and markets, where only a few years ago streams of women and children would be met, toiling along narrow bush tracks, carrying heavy loads of palm-oil and kernels to the bush markets or river-sides.

Chiefs, who in those days were only "small boys," now own motor-cars, in which they are driven by their chauffeurs to the markets or to the native courts. Factories have been established at nearly all the large centres of population. English and Nigerian currency is used everywhere in places where only cowrie shells or manillas would have passed. A railway line, on which are situated numbers of trading establishments managed by Europeans, now runs through the centre of the Bende District, passing within a few miles of the place where the incident of "The Black Goat" took place. Schools under Government or Mission control have been established in every town of any size. The tinkling of the Mission church bells has taken the place of the tom-tom, and calls people to the worship of Christ instead of to the unholy revels of the ju-ju with its human sacrifices and cannibal orgies. Trade of all descriptions has rapidly increased, and in consequence the bush native has become a respectable citizen.

In the old days when one walked through the villages, with their garbage, indescribably filthy swine wallowing in muddy pools in front of smoke-stained hovels, every man, woman and child was practically in a nude state. How changed it all is to-day. Walking through the same villages, which now have rows of well-kept, well-built houses, beautifully roofed with raffia-palm mats, with here and there a superior topside (*i.e.* two-storied) one, roofed with corrugated-iron, in front of which gardens can be seen, containing bushes of different-coloured hibiscus, amaryllus lilies, oleander, variegated crotons and many other tropical flowers, one would pass hardly a native not dressed more or less in European fashion. Many of them, if on a Sunday, being togged in their best, wending their way arm-in-arm to the Mission church, carrying prayer and hymn books.

By these and by other inhabitants the white man is greeted with a smile, the flashing of eyes and the gleam of white teeth being accompanied by a cheery " Good-marnin', sar." All are happy and contented, whereas their fathers before them lived precarious lives, eating one another, and never knowing which would be the next victim for the sacrificial tree or the cooking pot.

And where are those men who, in the days of twenty-five years ago, risked their lives almost daily in the bringing about of the present-day prosperous and happy conditions? Many of them have left their bones in the country they so admirably developed and controlled, while others have also joined the great majority and lie in early graves in Old England, or have " made holes " in the Bay of Biscay with their poor malaria-emaciated bodies, tipped over the side of an Elder Dempster steamer.

A few, far too few, are reaping their reward and taking their well-earned rest, eking out an existence derived from a pension paid by a fatherly Government. In summer-time they sit in the (very occasional) sunshine, the heat of which is so small compared with that in which they toiled for so many years; and in winter shivering over the fire in some small house, mostly forgotten by their successors of to-day, who have none of the hardships with which the men before them had to contend, and with only their past glories to look back upon.

It is probably a rare occurrence in Nigeria to-day to see a young administrative officer trekking along a narrow, winding bush path for sixteen miles or so in a day, followed by twenty or thirty carriers with his worldly possessions on their heads.

A far more familiar sight would be to see him driving in his car along smooth roads, followed by a half-ton Ford lorry in which would be ensconced his servants, and loaded with his equipment. When thirsty, instead of taking a swig of lukewarm water from a none too clean (externally at any rate) water-bottle, his servant brings him a cool bottle of Schweppes, or a hot cup of tea from a thermos flask.

We wonder if, when having his evening peg, he ever thinks of the men who trod the ground before him under such totally different conditions and helped to make his life so much easier; and if so, does he lift his glass and give the toast of "Here's luck to you, old birds"?

APPENDIX

NOTE ON THE ARO TRIBE

THE Aros, as they were in the early days of our occupation of the country which is now known as Nigeria, were quite a different racial type from the indigenous inhabitants of the Ibo country. They were of fine physique, with delicately moulded extremities and features more nearly approximating to the European than even the negroid peoples. Their colour too was very light, so much so that some of them might have been taken for very sunburned white men.

It is not definitely known where they originally came from. One theory is that they are the descendants of a colony of Phœnicians which had been established on the lower Congo. But this seems to be very unlikely, as they could hardly have kept their racial characteristics so nearly intact after the lapse of so many centuries.

Another theory, and a much more probable one, is that they are descended from some French missionaries who went to the Congo some years before the first Revolution. During the stirring times which followed in France, and the upsetting of religious organizations, it is assumed that these were forgotten, and remained in the country. Being shut off from their own world and seeing no hope of ever returning to

France, some of them no doubt "went native," and intermarried with Congo women.

The issue of these marriages must have been sufficiently numerous to maintain a certain isolation from the people among whom they lived, and intermarried among themselves, thus forming the race as it was when first discovered.

Having the good qualities of both races as well as the bad, these people had more *nous* than the negroes; and as intelligence always makes itself felt, they would become the ruling class.

When the migration to the Cross River took place is not known, for the Aros had lost the art of writing, probably before that date, consequently they have no records of their history. But it is very noticeable that they have retained certain traditions, since most of the men are priests and traders, and the form of some of their ceremonial certainly bears out the theory of their descent from Roman Catholics.

They are said to have been driven from the Congo by an invasion of a very numerous tribe of savage people, whom they could not resist on account of their own limited numbers. They took to the sea, it is alleged, in sailing canoes and came north. Having touched at several places, and probably meeting with hostile receptions, they landed on the right bank of the Bonny River, where they remained for some time, but eventually made their way inland, establishing their headquarters on the southern spur of the Enugu range of hills. Here they found a natural grotto, which later became the home of the "Long," or Aro-Chuku, Ju-ju.

Finding the country suited to their requirements as dealers in slaves, they established other centres, one being at the head of the Ewayong River—a tributary of the Cross River. From there it was easy to transport their " goods " to Old Calabar or Duke Town, then a slave-dealing port.

Aro-Chuku, however, remained their permanent headquarters, and it was from this place they were ousted by the expedition of 1901, which put an end to their diabolical activities. It is said that when the place was captured a few books were found, probably the tattered remnants of those brought out by their forefathers. They also pretended to be able to write, and used to send " letters " to each other, otherwise chips of wood on which figures of crosses, circles, etc. had been traced.

The word Aro is certainly not an Ibo name. Neither is Chuku, which is purely Aro and meant God. Both words are now generally used by Aros and Ibos alike; Chuku often in naming a male child. But in such cases it will generally be found that the child is of Aro descent.

When the Aros arrived they found, as was to be expected, that the natives were given to superstition and fetish worship. With their superior intelligence they saw their way to improve on these conditions so as to use them to their own advantage. Thus began their career as the ruling caste of Ibo-land, their mastery being maintained by the skilful manipulation of oracles and ju-jus.

They became very wealthy during the palmy days of the slave trade, since they paid nothing for their

" black ivory," slaves being the currency in which the fees for consulting the oracle were paid. Even when the export of slaves was finally put a stop to, there was still a market for human goods, and to maintain this they encouraged the horrible custom of sacrificing slaves at the funerals of deceased chiefs.

They were always against the penetration inland of Europeans, having sufficient intelligence to see in this the end of their rule—or misrule. And in their efforts to discourage such inroads they were responsible for much of the trouble that was encountered when opening up the country. They would pose as white men, and in this character would raid villages, destroy farms and enslave the inhabitants. Consequently when a genuine white man appeared he had the reputation of being given to such doings, and his passage through the country was either opposed or an early opportunity was taken to kill or drive him out.

These methods indicated the possession of cunning and intelligence far too subtle for any of the indigenous races, for the Aros never appeared themselves as the enemies of Europeans, and yet managed to oppose them on every occasion—by proxy. They made the bullets and the unsophisticated aborigine fired them off.

By 1900 their influence had extended from the coast to about two hundred miles inland, and from the Cross River to the Niger. Here they stopped, being far too wise to fall foul of the powerful king of Benin, whose sphere of influence extended to the right bank of the Niger.

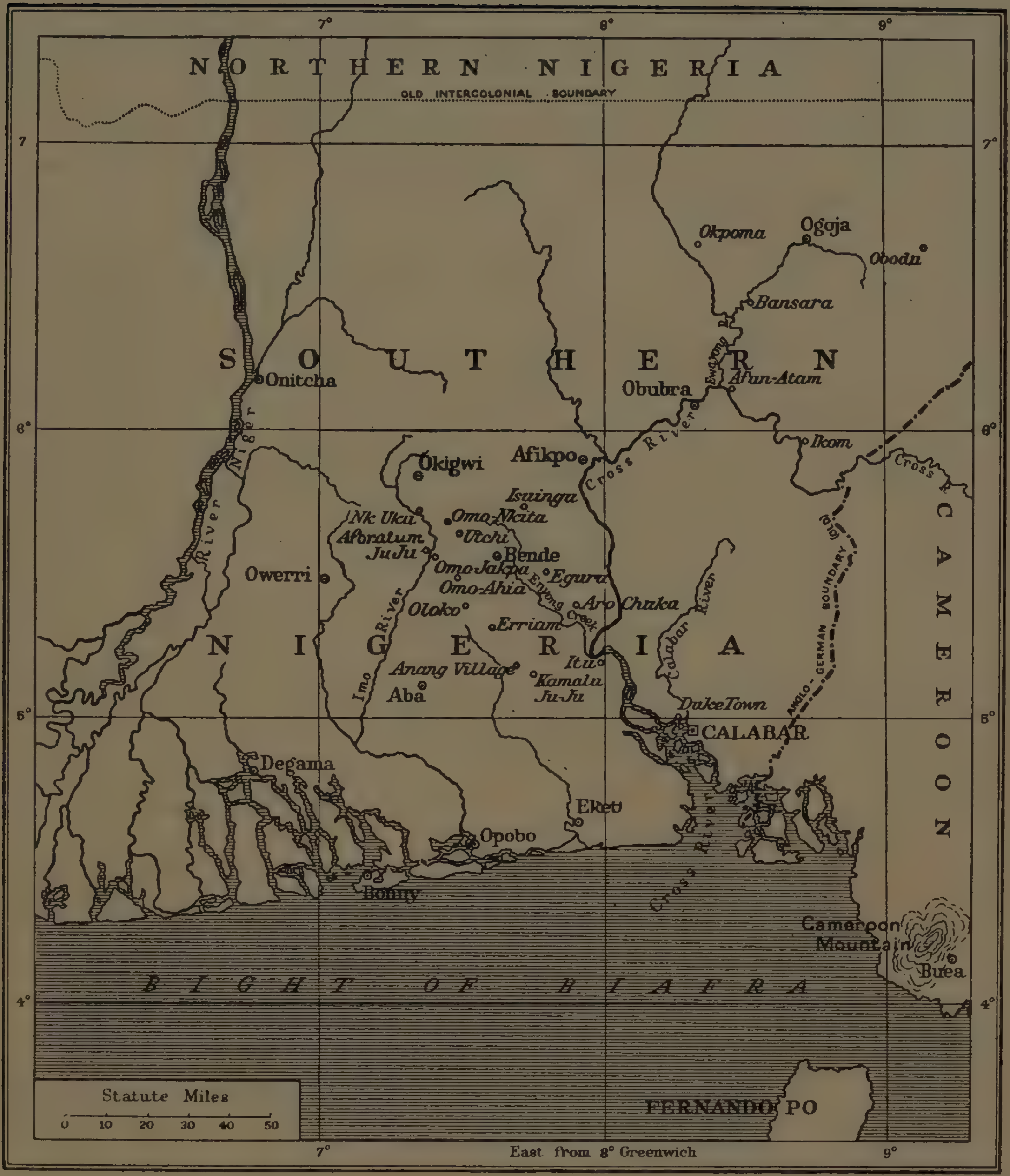
The Aros might have been useful in the development of the country had their character been different.

But they could never be trusted, and were always a thorn in the side of any unfortunate political officer whose duties lay in the territories they laid claim to.

As a race they are deteriorating. They are less intelligent than they were forty years ago, and are gradually being absorbed by the Ibo population. In a few more generations they will probably not be identifiable by any of their former characteristics, though the new breed will likely inherit a good deal of original sin.

A story is told which illustrates the character of this altering race, though the truth of it cannot be vouched for.

A certain political officer, who had been very much worried and handicapped in his administrative work through the machinations of the local Aros, was presiding in one of the native courts when a trivial case of breach of the new licensing laws came before him. The penalty for this was a nominal fine. When the accused appeared and was asked his name, he answered "Chuku." "Six months," said the political officer. "What for?" asked the astonished man, who had had his fine all ready to pay. "For being an Aro," was the reply.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MAP OF PART OF SOUTHERN NIGERIA

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